WAGNER'S TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

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TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

CONFESSIONS OF LOVE

FOTO

O yearnings of love —
All blossom and singing!
O langoun of love
All blessed and burning!
Wild in the heart it sings
Shouting for joy!
Love has escaped the world
Love, I have won thee!
Thou, only thou
Love's fathomless bliss

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WAGNER'S
TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

BY

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

WITH CRITIQUE

BY

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FOREWORD

THE *halo of romance encircles a great many incidents in the life of Richard Wagner, and this fact stamps him as the most interesting personality in the entire gallery of famous musicians. Measuring Wagner's character by the rule of commonplace conventionality, it is very easy to discover shortcomings: his supreme arrogance, his monumental ingratitude, and his enormous egoism; but, after these and other faults have been frankly admitted, it will be seen that the trait of fascinating interest still remains. Nothing can detract from it. His faults are glossed by his friends and*

are exaggerated by his enemies, while to those who believe in Wagner's greatness as an artist, they exist only to the extent of their influence upon his art.

Now, in the consideration of serious art, the morals or immorals of the artist have no place, save inasmuch as they have affected the art product. In the last few years there has come into the light of publicity a volume of love letters which are sheerly beautiful in their expression of sentiment. Apart from this they have vital bearing upon the history of the greatest music drama we possess. These letters were written by Richard Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck. And in the following pages the author has attempted to emphasise the artistic importance of the love that Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck bore each other, for out of this love grew the music of "Tristan and Isolde." This monumental work is treated here not alone from the viewpoint of its greatness, but also as a human document: a message from Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck. In writing this work, Wagner followed the dictates of his artistic convictions, but the inspiration came from the woman. And this proves his love for Mathilde Wesendonck to have been the most influential romance in his turbulent life.

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NOTE

The author of the Critique wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr. William J. Henderson for his advice and encouragement, and to Mr. Henry Edward Krehbiel for the books and collected information placed at his disposal. Also is he grateful to Mr. James Huneker for his guiding solicitude.

ACT I

Act I

(A tent-like chamber on the forward deck of a ship, covered with rich hangings that completely shut off the background; at one side a narrow stairway leading below to the cabin)

SCENE I

(Isolde, on a couch, her face buried in the cushions. Brangäna, drawing aside a curtain, looks aside overboard)

THE VOICE OF A YOUNG SAILOR

(from above, as if at the masthead)

WESTWARD
Our eyes roam,
Eastward
Rolls the ship.
Fresh blows the wind
For home:
My Irish child,
Where tarriest thou?
Is it thy sighs
That fill our sails?

Blow, blow, thou wind!
Woe, woe, ah, woe, my child!
My Irish child,
Thou wild and winsome child!

ISOLDE

(*starting up suddenly*)
Who dares to mock me thus?
(*she looks around in agitation*)
Brangäna, there!
Tell me where are we.

BRANGÄNA

(*at the opening*)
Blue streaks are rising
Out of the west;
Softly and swiftly
The good ship is sailing;
If but the sea be calm,
Safely by evening
We shall reach land.

ISOLDE

What land?

BRANGÄNA

The green shores of Cornwall.

ISOLDE

Nevermore!
Not to-day! not to-morrow!

BRANGÄNA

What mean you, my mistress?
(*she lets the curtain fall, and hastens, disturbed, to Isolde*)

ISOLDE

(*gazing wildly before her*)
Degenerate offspring;
Unworthy thy fathers!
Where, O my mother,
Bestowed thou the magic
That ruled sea and storm?
O tame is the witchcraft
That brews only balsams
To soothe and to heal!
Awake in my bosom,
Where thou art hiding,
The will once again!
Winds, timid winds,

Up to the battle!
Lash with your tempests,
Your furious anger,
Lash from its slumber
This smooth dreaming sea;
Stir its abysses
Of ravening hunger;
Cast it the prey
Which I bring.
This insolent ship
Let it shatter and swallow,
And, take, as your share,
O ye winds!
The last breath
Of the dead.

BRANGÄNA

(*in extreme alarm for Isolde, and much troubled*)

Woe! Woe!
Alas! Alas!
The evil I foresaw.
Isolde, mistress dear,
O heart of mine!
What hast thou kept from me,
Mistress, so long?

Without a tear, you left
Father and mother,
And scarce a farewell word
Spake to thy friends;
How cold and still thou stoodst
Parting from home!
How pale and speechless
On the way!
Foodless,
Sleepless,
Wild, distracted,
Rigid, wretched;
How did I endure
Seeing thee so?—
How strange it seems
To be
Nothing to thee!
O tell me
What troubles thee.
Say it. O speak it out;
Say what torments thee!
Lady Isolde,
If she seems worthy,
Trust thy Brangäna,
Confide thou in her.

ISOLDE

Air! Air!
Or my heart will stop—
Open the curtains!
(*Brangäna quickly draws apart the curtains*)

Act I, scene ii

(*The full length of the ship is displayed, up to the stern, with the sea and horizon beyond. About the mainmast, sailors are gathered, busying themselves with the tackle. Beyond them are seen groups of knights and pages; somewhat apart from these stands Tristan, with folded arms, looking fixedly off over the sea. At his feet, in a negligent pose, lies Kurwenal. From the masthead the young sailor is heard singing once more*)

THE YOUNG SAILOR

(*unseen, at the masthead*)

FRESH blows the wind
For home:
My Irish child,
Where tarriest thou?
Is it thy sighs
That fill our sails?
Blow, blow, thou wind!
Woe, woe, ah! woe my child!

ISOLDE

(*whose eyes have at once found Tristan, and remain fixedly on him, gloomily to herself*)

O my loved one!
O my lost one!
Lordly and strong,
Brave, yet so weak—
Head unto death devoted!
Heart unto death devoted!
(*laughing unnaturally*)
What thinkest thou of yonder knight?

BRANGÄNA

(*following her glance*)

Whom dost thou mean?

ISOLDE

That hero yonder,
Who turns his eyes away
From these, my eyes;
Shamefaced and timid,
Looketh away.
How seems he to thee?

BRANGÄNA

Is it Sir Tristan
You mean, my dear mistress?

Wonder of every realm,
Winner of every prize,
Famous so far and wide,
Hero unequalled—

ISOLDE
(*derisively*)
Who runs before the lash,
Flying for refuge,
Because he has brought his lord
A corpse for his bride!
Seems it so dark to thee
What I am saying?
Go ask this hero—
Dares he approach me!
Mark how he disregards
Even the common grace
Of salutation;
Forgets, timorous hero,
The reverence he owes me,
His sovereign mistress—
Catching no glance of mine.
Knight without equal!
Well he knows why!
Go to the proud one,

And take him my order,
I, his liege lady,
That straight he attends me.

BRANGÄNA

Shall I indeed request
That he attend thee?

ISOLDE

Nay, I command him:
Say, I, Isolde,
His sovereign mistress,
Command him, my vassal.

(*at an imperious sign from Isolde, Brangäna passes along the deck, past the busy group of sailors, to the stern. Isolde, keeping her eyes fixed on her, settles back on the couch, where she remains, with unmoved gaze looking astern, during what follows*)

KURWENAL

(*sees Brangäna coming, and, without rising, plucks Tristan by his garment*)

Tristan, be on your guard —
Word from Isolde!

TRISTAN

(*irritated*)

What is it? Isolde?

(*he quickly regains his composure, as Brangäna approaches and bows humbly to him*)

From my lady?
Ever her servant;
What is the message
Her trusted maid brings?

BRANGÄNA

Lord Tristan,
Isolde, my mistress,
Wishes to see thee.

TRISTAN

Does the long voyage
Make her aweary?
Tell her, the end is near,
Yea, before sunset
We shall touch land —
And all that my lady wills
Humbly I'll do.

BRANGÄNA

Her wish, my Lord Tristan,
Is that you go to her.

TRISTAN

Where yonder green meadows
Seem blue still with distance,
My king is awaiting
My mistress, his queen —
Soon shall I approach
My illustrious lady,
To take her to him.
To none would I yield
That honour so rare.

BRANGÄNA

Lord Tristan,
Please hear me:
This is my lady's will —
That you go to her
Now, where she waits thee.

TRISTAN

Wherever I am,
I am truly her servant,
Of women the glory.
But should I leave the helm,
How could I steer the ship
Safe to King Marke's land?

BRANGÄNA

Tristan, my master,
Why dost thou mock me?
If the dull maid
Seems not to speak plainly,
Hearken my lady's words:
Thus did she bid me speak—
"Say, I command him,
Say, I, Isolde,
His sovereign mistress,
Command him, my vassal."

KURWENAL

(*springing up*)

May I make answer?

TRISTAN

What wouldst thou then reply?

KURWENAL

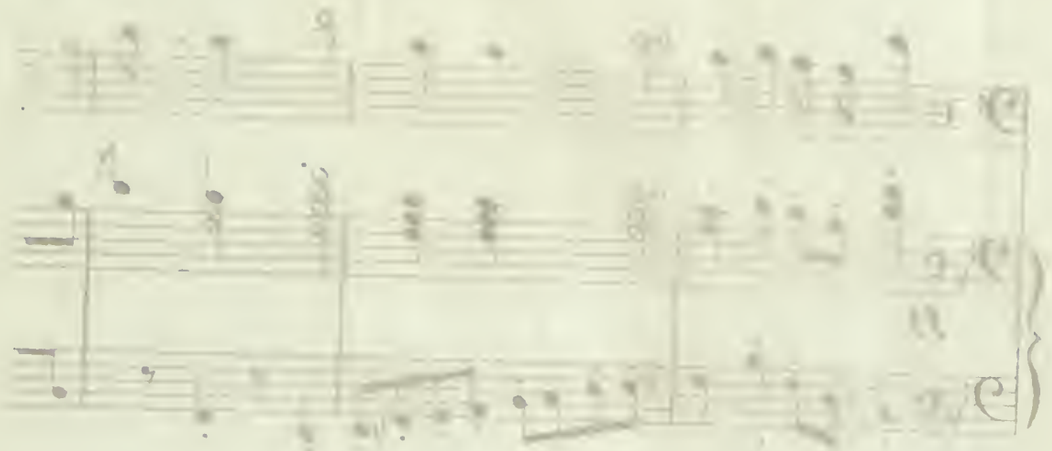
This let her say
To Lady Isolde:
"He who gives Cornwall's crown,
And England gives
To Ireland's maid,
Cannot make too much of

The self-same maid
He gives his uncle:
Lord of the world!
Tristan the hero!
So, I have cried it forth!
Now, say it thou—
Let a thousand Isoldes
Heap wrath upon me!

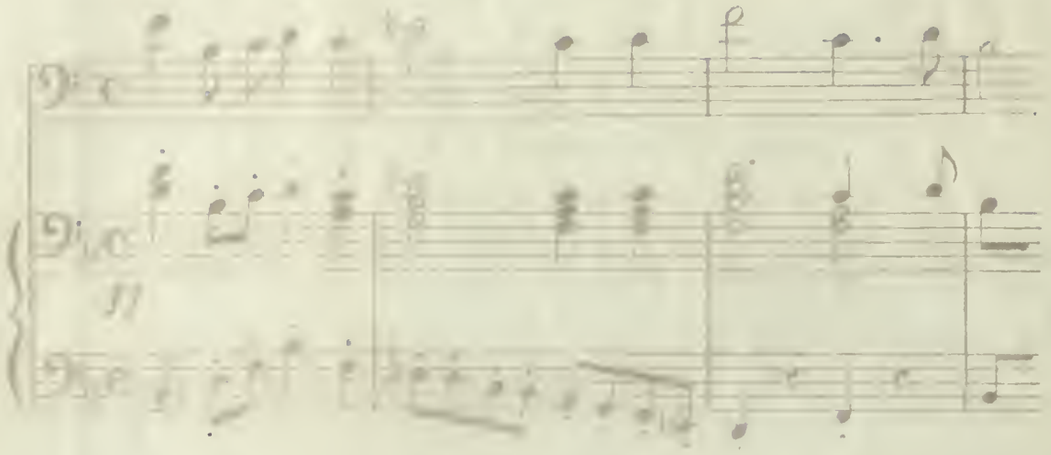
(*while Tristan seeks to check him by gestures, Brangäna, offended, turns to go away. As she lingeringly retires, Kurwenal sings after her at the top of his voice*)

"Lord Morold sped hither
Over the sea,
To take the Cornish tribute;
An island floats
On a desolate wave,
Where Morold now lies buried;
But his head hangs high
In Erin's land,—
So England paid her tribute.
Hail to our hero Tristan—
So, so is tribute paid!"

(*Kurwenal, reproved and driven away by Tristan, descends into the forward cabin. Brangäna, bewildered, returns to Isolde, and draws the curtains.*



GLORY TO TRISTAN



"So England paid her tribute.
Hail to our hero Tristan—
So to is tribute paid!"

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Meanwhile, the whole troop of retainers are heard without)

"His head hangs high
In Erin's land—
So England paid her tribute.
Hail to our hero Tristan,
So, so is tribute paid!"

Act I, scene iii

(*The curtains completely drawn. Isolde rises to her feet, with an expression of desperation and anger. Brangäna throws herself at her feet*)

BRANGÄNA

Ah me! Ah me!
Think of enduring this!

ISOLDE

(*suddenly controlling herself as she is about to give way to a wild outburst*)

Well, what of Tristan?
Tell me exactly.

BRANGÄNA

Ah, ask me not!

ISOLDE

Nay, speak without fear.

BRANGÄNA

With courtly words
He evaded me.

ISOLDE

But when plainly thou badest him?

BRANGÄNA

When I had bade him
Come to thee straightway
Thus he made answer:
"I am truly her servant,
Of women, the glory—
But, should I leave the helm,
How could I steer the ship
Safe to King Marke's land?"

ISOLDE

(*painfully and bitterly*)
He steer the ship
Safe to King Marke's land!
To pay him the tribute
From Ireland extorted.

BRANGÄNA

As I spake thy words,

Just as thou told me,
His knave Kurwenal dared —

ISOLDE

I heard him all too well,
No word escaped me.
Thou that hast witnessed
This outrage upon me,
Hear too the cause:
Even as they sing
Their mocking songs of me,
Well could I sing the like;
Sing of a certain skiff,
Small and frail, floating
Once to our Irish shore,
And of a sick man,
Piteous, languid,
Stretched in it dying.
Then with Isolde's art
Came he acquainted;
With many a healing salve
And juice of balsams,
Faithful, she soothed the wounds
Plaguing him sorely.
"Tantris," in cunning wise,

So had he named him;
But soon Isolde knew,
Knew him for Tristan;
For, in the tired one's sword,
Marked she a notch wherein
Fitted a splinter
Which once this hand had found
In the insulted head,
Sent back in scorn,
Of Erin's knight, Morold.
Then from the deeps it seemed
I heard a voice,
And, with the shining sword,
I stood above him,
Purposed to take revenge
On him, the over-bold,
For Morold's death.

But as he looked at me
Up from his bed,—
Not on the sword he looked,
Not on my hand.
Into my eyes he looked;
His helplessness touched me—
The sword that slew Morold

Fell from my hands.
His wounds I healed instead,
So that, again grown strong,
Back to his house and home
He might return,
And, with that look of his,
Haunt me no more.

BRANGÄNA

Wonderful! Wonderful!
Where were my eyes!
The guest I helped to nurse—

ISOLDE

Hark! how they sing his praise!
"Hurrah, for our Tristan!"
Ah, a fine man to trust!
How many thousand vows
Of fealty eternal
And thanks did he make me!
Now mark how a hero
Keeps to his oath:
He who as "Tantris"
I let go, unwitting,
Boldly as Tristan
Dares to return,

And from the high deck
Of his insolent galley,
Dares ask me in wedlock,
The heiress of Ireland, —
For Cornwall's old king;
His worn-out old uncle: —
Me for King Marke!
Ah, when Morold was living,
Who would have dared
Such an outrage upon us!
A Cornish prince, forsooth,
Paying us tribute,
Suing for Ireland's crown!
Ah, woe is me! —
It was I brought
This shame on my home,
When the avenging sword,
Instead of swinging,
I weakly let fall.
Now must I be the slave
Of my own vassal.
Curses upon thee, traitor!
Curses upon thy head!
Vengeance, and death —
Death to us both!

BRANGÄNA

(*throwing herself upon Isolde with impassioned tenderness*)

O sweet one! O true heart!
Dear, gracious and pure!
My golden mistress!
Dear Isolde!
Hear me! Come
Sit thee here!

(*gradually draws Isolde to the couch*)

What a wild fancy!
What groundless anger!
Why so deceive thyself?
Canst thou not see or hear?
How could Lord Tristan
Repay what he owes thee
Better than bring thee
The lordliest of crowns?
While so he loyally
Serveth his uncle,
To thee he thus proffers
This envied reward.
So true and so loyal
Is he, he renounces
His heirship, to throw him

Down at thy feet—
Hailing thee queen.
(*Isolde turns away*)
If he has won King Marke
For thee for husband,
Canst thou the choice berail?
Is he not worthy?
Noble is he of race,
Gentle of mind;
Who has excelled him
In might and in splendour?
Whom such a hero serves,
Who would not gladly
Taste of his favour,
And bide as his spouse?

ISOLDE

(*gazing fixedly before her*)
How could I,
Unbeloved,
Always see nigh me
That glorious hero?
How such a torture
Could I endure?

BRANGÄNA

O what wild words are these!
Thou unbeloved!
(*she approaches Isolde, soothing and caressing her*)
Where has there lived a man
Who loved thee not?
Who that has ever looked
Upon thee, Isolde,
But in enchantment
Fell 'neath thy charm?
Yet, should it happen
That someone thou chosest
Were even so cold;
If some dark magic
Should draw him from thee—
I would know how—
The impious ingrate!
To bind him in chains
Of the might that is love.
(*mysteriously and intimately drawing near to Isolde*)
Knowest thou not
The arts of thy mother?
Deemest that she
Who pondered on all things,

Always so wise,
Would, without forethought,
Have thus sent me with thee
To a strange land?

ISOLDE

(*gloomily*)

Thou hast done well
To recall my wise mother —
Grateful indeed am I
For her strange skill:
Revenge for the betrayer;
Heartsease in time of need.

Bring me the casket yonder.

BRANGÄNA

In it lies hidden
What shall avail thee.

(*she brings a small golden casket, opens it, and points to its contents*)

In it thy mother
Has ranged in fair order
Her mysterious philtres,
Drinks thaumaturgic.

Balm for all woes is here,
Balm for all wounds;
And for each poison
Each poison's cure.
(*she takes out a little phial*)
The bravest drink of all
I have it here!

ISOLDE

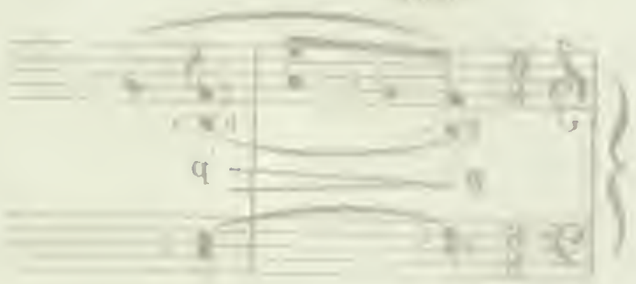
Thou art wrong; a far better
I know by this mark I made,
See, here upon it, —
This is the drink I need!
(*she takes up another phial and shows it*)

BRANGÄNA

(*starting back in dismay*)
The drink of death!
(*Isolde has risen from her couch and now hears, with increasing dread, the cries of the sailors*)

VOICES OF THE CREW

(*without*)
Ho! heave ho! ho! hey!
Reef the sails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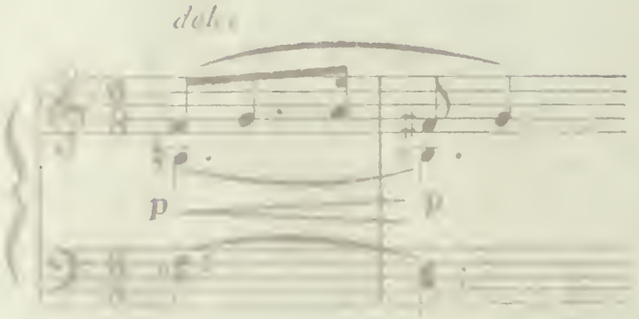

PHILIP

Thou art wrong; a far better
I know by this mark I made,
See, here upon it. —
This is the drink I need!

FRANCESCA

The drink of death!

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To the yard arms!
Ho! heave ho! ho! hey!

ISOLDE

Too swift has been our voyage!
Woe's me! So near the land!

Act I, scene iv

(*Kurwenal blusteringly enters through curtain*)

UP, ladies, up!
Blithe and gay,
Quickly array you.
And to Lady Isolde,
My lord, hero Tristan,
Bids me say this:
From the masthead
Flutters our flag of peace
Gallantly landward;
To the hold of King Marke
It tells of our coming.
Therefore, he prays
The Lady Isolde
To hasten prepare herself,
Ready for landing,
That he may attend her.

ISOLDE

(*after at first shrinking back in dread at the message, calmly and with dignity*)

Take to Lord Tristan
My greeting, and tell him
That to go by his side
To King Marke were unseemly,
Unbecoming, ungentle,
Until he has wrought me
Atonement for guilt
That is yet unatoned:
For that bid him seek my grace.

(*Kurwenal makes a gesture of defiance*)

Now, mark well what I say,
And deliver it truly;
I will not prepare me
To go on land with him,
Nor go by his side
To the throne of King Marke;
Till, as is fitting,
He sues my forgiveness,
My gracious forgetting,
For his unatoned wrong:
Only that way can he
Win back my favour.

KURWENAL

Be assured,
I will say it all;
Now await how he hears it.
(*he retires quickly*)

Act I, scene v

ISOLDE

(*hurries to Brangäna and embraces her vehemently*)

NOW farewell, Brangäna!
Greet every one for me —
Greet my father and mother!

BRANGÄNA

What is this!
O what meanest thou?
Wouldst thou flee?
Whither then must I follow?

ISOLDE

(*checking herself suddenly*)

Didst thou not hear me?
Here I remain,
Tristan awaiting.
Now faithfully follow

What I command thee;
Quickly prepare the drink
Of expiation
Which, thou remember'st,
I showed thee.

BRANGÄNA

What drink was that?

ISOLDE

(*taking a flask from the casket*)
This drink it is.
Into the golden cup
Pour it all out;
The cup will hold all—

BRANGÄNA

(*filled with horror, taking the flask*)
O can I trust my senses!

ISOLDE

Mind thou art faithful!

BRANGÄNA

The draught—for whom is it?

ISOLDE

For him who betrayed me.

BRANGÄNA

Tristan?

ISOLDE

He shall drink his atonement!

BRANGÄNA

(*throwing herself at Isolde's feet*)

Horror; O spare me,
Unhappy girl!

ISOLDE

(*passionately*)

Spare thou *me*,
Faithless maid!
Hast thou forgotten
The arts of my mother?
Deemest that she,
Who pondered on all things,
Always so wise,
Would, without forethought,
Have sent me with thee
To a strange land.

Balm for all woes
Hath she not sent me?
Balm for all wounds,
And for each poison
Each poison's cure;
And for the deepest woe,
And direst wound,
Sent me the death-drink.
Now shall Death thank her!

BRANGÄNA
(*scarcely able to control herself*)
O deepest grief!

ISOLDE
Wilt thou obey me?

BRANGÄNA
O supreme woe!

ISOLDE
Wilt thou be faithful?

BRANGÄNA
The draught?

KURWENAL

(*entering*)

Sir Tristan!

(*Brangäna rises terror-stricken and dazed. Isolde makes a supreme effort to control herself*)

ISOLDE

(*to Kurwenal*)

Sir Tristan may approach.

Act I, scene vi

(*Kurwenal goes away. Brangäna, with difficulty mastering herself, retires to the background. Isolde, summoning all her power of will, walks slowly, with lofty mien, back to the couch and, supporting herself by its head, fixes her eyes upon the entrance.*
Tristan enters and stands respectfully at the entrance)

TRISTAN

LADY, demand
What thou wilt.

ISOLDE

Knowest thou not well
What my wish is?
'Twas fear to fulfill it
That kept thee afar
From my eyes?

TRISTAN

Reverence for thee
Held me back

ISOLDE

All the less honour
Thou showedst me;
Openly scorned to obey me.

TRISTAN

Obedience alone
Kept me away.

ISOLDE

Methinks, little thanks
Then I owe
To thy lord, if his service
Encourages manners
So ill-bred
Towards his own bride.

TRISTAN

In the land where I live,
The custom is always
That he who brings home
The bride to the bridegroom,
Should, on the journey,
Keep far from the bride.

ISOLDE

For what reason?

TRISTAN

'T is the custom.

ISOLDE

Since, my Lord Tristan,
Thou 'rt so heedful of custom,
Of this good custom
Let me remind you:
To thy foe make atonement,
Boast thy foe as thy friend.

TRISTAN

And what foe?

ISOLDE

Ask thy fears!
Blood-guilt
Floats up between us.

TRISTAN

That was atoned for.

ISOLDE

Not between us.

TRISTAN

In open field,
Before all the folk,
The oath that ends
Revenge was sworn.

ISOLDE

'T was not there
I hid Tantris
When Tristan lay dying.
Lordly he stood there,
Haughty and hale,
Yet what he swore to
Never swore I;
I had learned silence
In that hushed chamber
Where sick he lay.
As, mute before him,
I stood with the sword,
Silent my mouth was,
Powerless my hand;
Yet what my hand and mouth
Erstwhile had promised,
Silent, I swore to do—
And now my word I'll keep.

TRISTAN

What didst thou swear, lady?

ISOLDE

(*quickly*)

Vengeance for Morold!

TRISTAN

(*calmly*)

Does that prey on thee still?

ISOLDE

(*quickly*)

Darest thou scorn me thus?
My own betrothed was he,
That hero of Erin;
His sword had I blessed for him,
For me only he drew it.
When he fell—
Fell too my glory,
And in my weary heart
I made this vow:
If no man avenge him,
I, a mere maiden,
Would dare to avenge.
Why, when all weak and languid,

Safe in my power I held thee,
Did I not slay thee—
Maybe your nimble wit
Fathoms the reason.
Thy wounds I tended,
Hoping, when hale and sound,
Isolde might win some man,
Avenging, to smite thee.
Now, thine own future
Thyself can foretell,
For since all mankind
Seems in compact with thee,
Who shall lay low then
This haughty Sir Tristan?

TRISTAN

(*pale and sad, holds out his sword to her*)

Was Morold then so dear to thee?
Then take again this sword,
And hold it sure and fast,
That this time it falls not.

ISOLDE

Nay, keep thy sword!
Though I once swung it,
When all my bosom

Wrestled for vengeance;
When thy swaying eyes
My image stole,
Pondering were I
Fit spouse for King Marke;
Then 'twas the sword fell down.
Now let us drink to peace!

(*she beckons Brangäna, who totters and hesitates in her movements. Isolde urges her with impetuous gestures. As Brangäna sets about preparing the drink, the shouts of the sailors are heard*)

VOICES OF THE CREW

(*without*)

Ho! heave ho! ho! hey!
Reef the sails
To the yard arms!
Ho! heave ho! ho! hey!

TRISTAN

(*arousing himself from his gloomy thoughts*)

Where are we?

ISOLDE

Near to our goal.
Tristan, have I won

Thy forgiveness?
What canst thou say?

TRISTAN

(*gloomily*)

The mistress of silence
Bids me be silent;
I know well what her silence keeps,
But I keep silent what she knows not.

ISOLDE

O what thy silence means
I know full well,
Thou wouldst evade me—
Dost thou deny me still,
Still thy forgiveness?

(*the calls of the sailors are heard once more. At an impatient sign from Isolde, Brangäna hands her the brimming goblet*)

ISOLDE

(*walking with the cup towards Tristan, who gazes immovably into her eyes*)

Thou heardst the sailor's song!
It is our journey's end.
With but a brief delay—

(*with slight scorn*)
We stand before Marke!

SAILORS
(*without*)
Up with the tow-line,
Down with the anchor!

TRISTAN
(*starting wildly*)
Down with the anchor!
Her stern to the tide—
To the winds her masts and sails!
(*he snatches the cup impetuously from Isolde*)
Ah! do I not know
Ireland's queen,
And all her enchantments,
Her magical powers—
Did not her balsams heal
Me my wounds?
Now let me drink this cup—
That I, to-day,
Shall drink joy in full;
Also pay heed
To my oath of atonement,
That I, as thanks to thee,

Make with my heart!
Tristan, his honour!
And all Tristan's truth!
And all Tristan's sorrow!
And all Tristan's fight!
And all his illusion,
His dream so foreboding
Of sorrow immortal.
Kindly oblivion—
How gladly I drink thee!
(*he lifts the cup and drinks*)

ISOLDE

Even now thou betrayest me!
No I must share it!
(*she wrests the cup from his hand*)
Traitor, I drink it!
(*she drinks, then throws down the goblet. Each, filled with terror, looks with the greatest excitement, though rigid in attitude, unwaveringly in the other's eyes, in the expression of which deadly hatred soon gives way to glowing love. Trembling overcomes them; they clutch at their hearts and then press their hands to their foreheads. They gaze again at each other, lower their glances, then raise their eyes to each other with growing longing*)

ISOLDE

(*with trembling voice*)

Tristan!

TRISTAN

(*overcome*)

Isolde!

ISOLDE

(*sinking upon his breast*)

Faithless beloved!

TRISTAN

Woman divine!

(*he embraces her with ardour. They remain in a silent embrace*)

ALL THE MEN

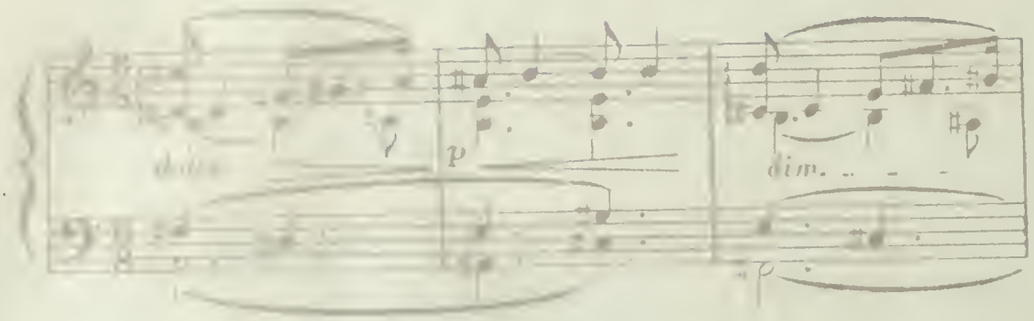
(*without*)

Hail! Hail!
Hail to King Marke!
Hail to our King!

BRANGÄNA

(*who, with face turned away, has been leaning over the side of the ship, now turns her eyes — to see the two lovers locked in each other's arms.*

THE LOVE PHILTRE



ISOLDE

(with trembling voice)

Tristan!

TRISTAN

(overcome)

Isolde!

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She rushes to the front, wringing her hands in despair)

Woe! Woe!
Sorrow eternal
Instead of brief death!
How foolish the act
Of my fond faithful heart!

(*they start from their embrace*)

TRISTAN

(*bewildered*)

What was my troubled dream
Of Tristan's lost honour?

ISOLDE

What was my troubled dream
Of Isolde's lost shame?

TRISTAN

Lost art thou then to me?

ISOLDE

Have I refused thee?

TRISTAN

O wicked enchantment
Of witch's strange art!

BOTH

O yearnings of love—
All blossom and singing!
O languor of love,
All blesséd and burning!
Wild in the heart it sings,
Shouting for joy!
Love has escaped the world,
Love, I have won thee!
Thou, only thou—
Love's fathomless bliss.

Act I, scene vii

(*The curtains are now drawn wide apart, revealing the whole ship, filled with knights and sailors, who, with shouts of joy, look overboard toward the land, where, on a high rock, a castle is seen. Tristan and Isolde remain lost in each other, seeing nothing of what is passing*)

BRANGÄNA

(*to the women, who, at her bidding, come up from below*)

MAKE haste!
The queen's mantle!

(*rushing between Tristan and Isolde*)

O hapless ones!
Look where we are!

(*she places the royal mantle on Isolde, who does not heed it*)

ALL THE MEN

Hail! Hail!
Hail to King Marke!
Hail to our King!

KURWENAL

(*coming forward gaily*)

Hail to thee, Tristan!
Fortunate hero!
See where King Marke,
With retinue royal,
And kingly arrayed,
Comes on yon bark.
Ah! how glad is he
Of the short journey—
Longing, himself, himself
To woo his own bride!

TRISTAN

(*looking up in a dazed way*)

Who comes?

KURWENAL

The King.

TRISTAN

What king?

(*Kurwenal points over the side. Tristan gazes abstractedly toward the land*)

ALL THE MEN

(*waving their hats*)

Hail to King Marke!
Hail! Hail!

ISOLDE

(*distractedly, to Brangäna*)

What is it, Brangäna?
O hearken those cries!

BRANGÄNA

Isolde, my lady!
Control thyself—
Just for to-day.

ISOLDE

O tell me where I am!
Am I still living?
What was that potion?

BRANGÄNA

(*despairingly*)

The love potion.

ISOLDE

(*horror-stricken, stares at Tristan*)

Tristan!

TRISTAN

Isolde!

ISOLDE

Must I still live?
(*throws herself in a swoon upon his breast*)

BRANGÄNA

(*to the women*)
Attend to your mistress!

TRISTAN

O the bliss born of illusion!
The hallowed joy made out of dreams!

ALL THE MEN

(*in a general burst of acclamation*)
Hail to King Marke!
To Cornwall, all hail!
(*men are seen climbing over the bulwarks; others lower a bridge; and the demeanour of all indicates the arrival of important personages: whereupon the curtain falls quickly*)

ACT II

Act II

(*A garden with high trees, before Isolde's chamber, to which steps lead up, at one side. A clear, balmy, summer night. At the open door is a burning torch. Sounds of the chase are heard*)

SCENE I

(*Brangäna, standing on the steps, looks off into the distance at the receding hunters. Isolde comes forth from her chamber, eager and excited*)

ISOLDE

DOST thou still hear them?
To me all the sound of the hunters
Seems died away.

BRANGÄNA
(*listening*)
Nay, they are near still;
Yonder I hear them yet.

ISOLDE
(*listening*)
It is but fear

Misleads thine ear.
The rustling leaves,
The laughing wind
Tosses about,
Delude thee.

BRANGÄNA

Thou art deluded.
The wildness of loving
Maketh thee hear
Just what thou wilt.
Still I hear horns.

ISOLDE

(*listens*)
The hunter's horn
Sounds not so sweet.
How could I hear
The murmuring fountain
Gentle with ripples,
How could I hear it,
If horns were still blowing?
In the still night it laughs
Its silent laughter.
Who waits and longs for me
In the still night?

Wilt thou keep him from me,
Longing and waiting,
Because of thy fancy
That thou hearest horns?

BRANGÄNA

Who waits for thee?
O hear my warning!
A spy there is who waits
Nightly for him as thou.
Often I see him
Craftily lurking, —
Beware of Melot,
Who waits with his net,
Secretly waits thee.

ISOLDE

Sir Melot, thou meanest?
O thou art quite deceived!
Is he not Tristan's friend?
Must I not see my love,
Because he and Tristan
Are always together?

BRANGÄNA

What makes me suspicious
Makes thee his friend then?

Through Tristan to Marke
Is Sir Melot's way:
He sows the seed of lies
In King Marke's ear.
'Twas this same seed to-day,
Sown at the council,
Decreed the hunt to-night.
Ah! dost thou dream
How noble the quarry
They hunt for to-night?

ISOLDE

'Twas but for love of him,
His friend so dear,
Melot, his friend,
Planned this device;
Wilt thou still scorn his faith?
More true than thou
Is he to me;
And unto him he gives
Aid thou refusest!
O spare me this delay!
The signal, Brangäna —
O pray give the signal!
Put out the last glimmer

Of torch and of candle,
That night may come down on us;
Beckoning yonder,
Already her silence
Swathes hedge and house;
Already she fills the heart
Full with delight.
O put the light out—
Quench the last fleeing ray,
Let in my loved one!

BRANGÄNA

Quench not the warning flame!
Of peril it warns thee!
Woe! Woe!
Ah, poor me!
O that unholy drink!
I, but unfaithful once,
Merely thy servant;
O had I, deaf and blind,
Foolish, obeyed thee—
Death had it been to thee,
And thy dishonour—
Shame and all sorrow—
I, I, confess it.

ISOLDE

Thou, thou, then did it!
O foolish girl!
Dost thou not know
The goddess called — Love?
Of her power knowest nothing?
Of brave spirits the queen,
And ruler of all things;
Death and Life are her servants,
Pleasure and pain,
Weaving all evil
Into all love;
Death's work I dared to do;
The Goddess of Love
Has stolen my power —
The love-and-death-doomed ones
She took as her pledge,
Doing her own work,
With her own hand.
Whatso her purpose be,
Whatso our end shall be,
What she shall choose for me,
Whither she leads me,
Hers am I wholly,
Slave to her will.

BRANGÄNA

Must love's delirious draught
Quench reason's light in thee?
Canst thou not heed
When I would warn thee?
Only to-day, I pray,
Hearken my pleading!
To-day, but to-day,
Put not the torch out,
Danger's bright beacon.

ISOLDE

She who within my heart
Kindles the glow,
She who my bosom fills
With fragrant fire,
She, who as morning,
Laughs in my soul—
The Goddess of Love—
It is her commandment
That it be night—
So, that her light may shine,
Thine be extinguished.
(*she goes to the door and takes down the torch*)
Go thou to the watch-tower!

Faithfully watch there —
And, were yon flaming torch
My flame of life,
Laughing, I'd quench it.

(*she throws the torch to the ground, where it gradually dies out. Brangäna, distracted, turns away, to climb, by an outer stairway, up to the battlements, where she slowly disappears. Isolde listens and looks, timorously at first, through an avenue of trees. With increasing longing, she goes nearer to the trees and looks with more boldness. She beckons with a kerchief, at first a little only, then oftener, then with passionate impatience faster and faster. A sudden gesture of passionate delight shows that she has perceived her lover in the distance. She lifts herself higher and higher and, to gain a farther outlook, hastens back to the stairway, from the uppermost step of which she beckons to her approaching lover; and, on his entrance, springs to meet him*)

Act II, scene II

TRISTAN

(*rushing in*)
SOLDE! Beloved!

ISOLDE

I Tristan! My loved one!
(*they embrace passionately, and come down to the front of the stage*)

BOTH

O art thou really mine?
O is it thou again?
Dare I embrace thee?
Can I believe my eyes?
At last, love, at last!
Here, on my breast,
Do I then hold thee,
Thee, thee, thyself?
O is it thou?
Are these thine eyes?

Is this thy mouth?
And here is thy hand,
And here is thy heart!
It is I! Is it thou?
Art thou here in my arms?
Is it no fancy?
Is it no dreaming?
O is it thou?
Ah, love, the spirit's joy!
Sweetest, and greatest,
Bravest, and fairest,
Hallowed delight!
Where is thy equal?
Too rich!
And too happy!
Always and always!
Bliss unforeseen,
Unconceived of,
So unknown!
Joy overflowing;
Lifted to heaven,
Shouting for joy;
Lost in high heaven,
Forgotten the world!
My Tristan!

Isolde!
Tristan!
Isolde!
Mine and thine!
Thine only,
Mine only,
One are we two
For ever and ever!

TRISTAN

O but this light!
The light, the light!
O how long it burned!
The sun had gone down,
And all faded the day,
Yet it burned on,
Nor could daylight put out
Its menacing gleam,
Its envious warning
Set at my loved one's door,—
That I should come not!

ISOLDE

Yet 't was thy loved one's hand
Put out the light!
What my maid feared to do

Why should I fear!
I in the keeping,
And strong with the might,
Of the Goddess of Love.
Why should I fear the day?
And yet the day,
Driven thus forth,
Took its revenge,
With all thy sinning
The daylight took counsel:
What the dusk torch of night
Gave thee, thou must give back
To the imperial sun,
Back to the royal day—
That I may shimmer there
In desolate splendour!
How did I bear it?
How bear it still?

TRISTAN

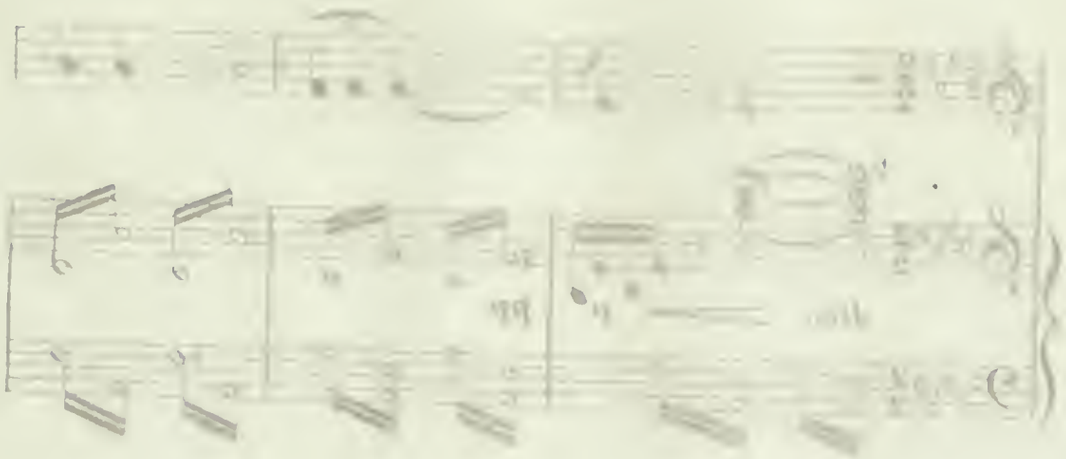
O we were dedicate
To this sweet night!
The thievish day,
Jealous of joy,
Planned to divide us!

Yet we no more believe
Its foolish lies.
All its vain pomp,
And flashing splendour,
Its vaunt of brightness,
Are laughter to him
Whom the holy night
Gives her glad eyes.
The fleeting light of day
Can no more blind us.
He whom the night of death
Has lovingly gazed in,
Whom she has whispered
Her mystical secret, —
To him the daylight's lies,
Its fame and its honour,
Ambition and power,
Shining so brightly,
Are like the motes
That dance in the sunbeam.
Through all the hollow day,
Only one longing,
Longing for night,
Night, holy night —
When, the eternal,

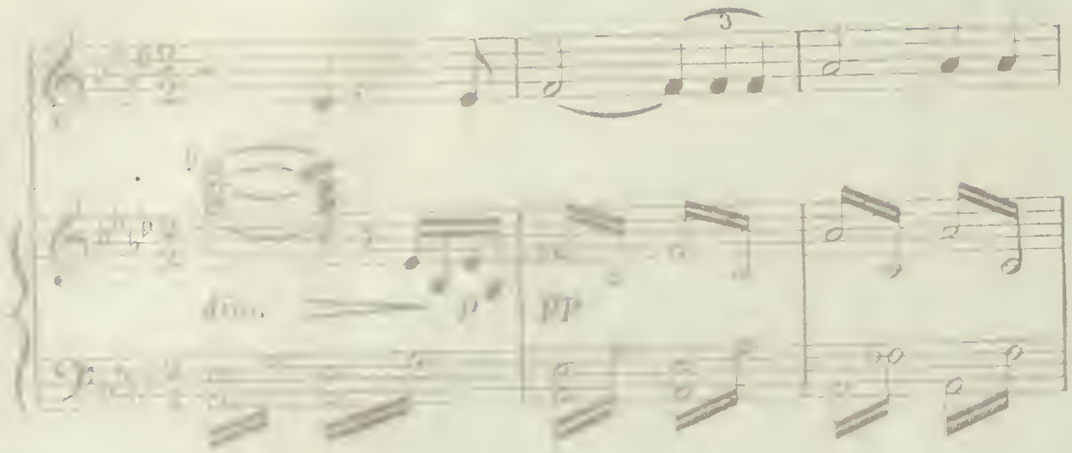
Primal, delight of love
Smileth upon him.
(*Tristan draws Isolde gently aside to a bank of flowers, falls on his knee before her, and rests his head upon her arm*)

BOTH

O fall, sweet night,
Upon us both,
Thou night of love;
Give us oblivion,
Make us forget
That we are living.
Ah, take us to thy breast!
From the world free us!
See! the last lights go out!
All the forebodings,
All the false dreams,
Each fearsome thought,
The sacred twilight,
With its sweet breathing,
Hushing the earth to sleep,
Takes all away.
Though we have hid the sun
Deep 'twixt our bosoms,
The stars go on shining,



INVOCATION TO NIGHT



"O full, sweet night,
Upon us both."

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The stars of our love,
Spun, like the planets, round
To thy enchantment, —
Night, thy soft eyes!
Ah! thy heart to my heart,
And my mouth to thy mouth!
Only one breath —
My eyes are gone from me,
Blinded with loving thee,
And the world fades,
With all its false radiance;
Unafraid of its lies —
For thou art my world,
And thy world am I;
Weaving the weft of our delight,
Dreaming our holy dreams;
Our pure desire,
From all illusion free,
The sleep that wakes not;
Fearing no more.

(*Tristan and Isolde sink, with heads side by side, in rapture, upon the bank of flowers*)

BRANGÄNA

(*invisible, singing, as from the watch-tower*)

Lonely I watch,

All through the night;
You that are lost
In the dream of your love,—
Dream, love, and laughter,—
Believe you the lonely one,
Sorrow is coming—
Beware! O beware!
The night is soon passing.

ISOLDE

Listen, beloved!

TRISTAN

Wilt thou not let me die!

ISOLDE

(*slowly raising herself*)
O jealous watcher!

TRISTAN

(*remaining reclined*)
I will never awaken!

ISOLDE

But, Tristan, the dawn—
That must arouse thee.

TRISTAN

(*raising his head slightly*)

Let the dawn
Yield to death!

ISOLDE

Day and Death—
Can they together
Win us our love!

TRISTAN

(*draws Isolde to him with an expressive gesture*)

O could we only die,
Die thus together!
Forever each other's,
Always our own;
Never a thought of fear,
Never awakening,
Only in love forgot,
Each other's wholly;
Live all our life away,
Loving each other.

ISOLDE

(*gazing up at him, lost in rapture*)

Would we might die,
So, undivided—

TRISTAN

Each one each other's!

ISOLDE

Forever each other's.

TRISTAN

Without a fear.

ISOLDE

Never awaking.

TRISTAN

Sharing the bliss of love—

ISOLDE

Each unto each—
Love all our heaven.
(*Isolde, overpowered, lets her head fall upon his breast*)

BRANGÄNA'S VOICE

(*from above, as before*)
Beware! Beware!
Already the night
Pales before day.

TRISTAN

(*bowing laughingly over Isolde*)

Shall I go hide?

ISOLDE

Let me go die!

TRISTAN

Shall I awaken?

ISOLDE

Nothing can wake me.

TRISTAN

Shall not the morning
Awaken Tristan?

ISOLDE

Let Day to Death give place.

TRISTAN

Biddest thou that I defy
The dawn, with all its threats?

ISOLDE

(*with growing passion*)

To flee from its lying.

TRISTAN

Has not the dawn
Startled us sometimes
With radiant warning?

ISOLDE

(*rising to her feet with an impetuous gesture*)
The night will watch o'er us!
(*Tristan follows her; they embrace in ecstasy*)

BOTH

O night so sweet!
O night eternal!
Sacred on high,
Night of our love!
How could the bravest
Bear thee go by?
Him upon whom thy smile,
Love-night, hath fallen!
How could he dare awake,
Filled with forebodings?
Waken from thee!
How could conceive it?
All this delight of love,
Far from the sun,
Far from the partings,

And all the complainings
That come with the days,
Can we bear lose it?
No more repining,
Enfolded by night,
Partings no more!
Concealment no more!
Only our love and trust!
Only our home in space
Infinite—full of dreams!
Art thou Isolde?
Tristan am I.
Thou art no more Isolde,
No more am I Tristan;
We have names nevermore:
One name forever—
Nevermore parted,
Sharing the newness
Of all our new wisdom,
Sharing the fire
Of love ever new,
Forever, together,
One heart and one soul—
O all the burning joy
Of Love's glowing breast!

Act II, scene iii

(*Brangäna utters a cry. Tristan and Isolde remain in their attitude of rapture. Kurwenal rushes in, with naked sword*)

KURWENAL

SAVE yourself, Tristan!

(*he looks with terror behind him toward the background, where Marke, Melot, and courtiers, in hunting costume, are seen approaching gaily through the avenue of trees; they pause in astonishment before the lovers. At the same time Brangäna descends from the watch-tower on the battlements and rushes toward Isolde, who, with involuntary shame, turning away her face, supports herself upon the flowery bank. Tristan, in like involuntary agitation, with one hand extends his mantle so as to shield Isolde from the eyes of the newcomers. He continues in this attitude a long time, immovable, directing*

a firm gaze upon the hunters, who gaze at him with varying expressions of emotion. Dawn glimmers)

TRISTAN

The desolate day!
It dawns for the last time.

MELOT

(*to Marke*)

Tell me, my king,
Was not my accusation just?
Tell me if I have saved
The head I gave thee as pawn;
Promising that thou shouldst see
Him in the act.
Thine honour and fame
Have I saved from dishonour,
Saved thee from shame.

MARKE

(*after profound agitation, with quivering voice*)

Hast thou really done so?
Is it not a wild fancy?
Look at him yonder,
Truest of all men,
Look at him yonder,

Friend of all friends!
And yet this friend so true
Has stricken my heart,
False as my bitterest foe,
Has Tristan deceived me?
If so, what hope have I
That Melot is true,
That Melot's wise speeches
Shall save me the honour
His lies stole from me!

TRISTAN

(*with vehemence*)

False phantoms of morning,
Dreams of the dawn,
Illusions all empty,
Dissolve in the sky!

MARKE

(*deeply moved*)

This from thee, Tristan!
Tristan — to me!
Where has truth fled away,
If Tristan is false?
Where look for honour,
Or the true breed of men,

If Tristan, all hoarded-up honour,
Has thrown it away?
And virtue, who Tristan chose
For her own buckler,
Where has she fled?
Now she has left my friend,
Now Tristan betrays me!

(*Tristan lowers his eyes and, as Marke continues, shows more and more dejection in his mien*)

To what end
All thy deeds
Done for my glory,
Grandeur and power,
Done for me, Marke?
Must all this service done,
Glory and fame and power,
Be paid back by Marke's shame?
Seemed the reward so small,
Fame and a realm,
That thou didst win,
The heirship he gave thee,
The realm for thine own!
When he, a childless man,
Saw his wife die,
He loved thee so

That never again
Did he dream of a wife.
When all the folk,
Courtiers and peasants,
Clamoured, with prayer and threat,
A queen for his realm,
A spouse for his choice;
When thou thyself
Didst conjure thy uncle
To graciously grant
The will of the court,
And the will of the folk,
Firm against courtiers,
Firm against peasants,
Firm against thee,
He, with all gentle craft,
Refused, until thou,
Tristan, didst threaten
To leave court and kingdom,
If thou wert sent not
To win him a bride;
That he allowed thee to do.
This charméd woman
Thy valour won me,
He who on her could look,

He who could speak to her,
He who could call her his,
What should he be
But all pride and blessing!
Her whom I drew not near
Because of my worship,
Because of the fear
That was reverence of her —
Her so exalted,
All glory and goodness,
Her that should quicken
The old life in me —
Queenliest bride —
Her thou didst bring me,
Fearless of every foe.
Why must I live in hell,
Hopeless of heaven?
Why must I bear this shame,
Unhelped even of tears?
Who this inscrutable,
Fathomless, mystery,
Who shall make clear?

TRISTAN

(*raising his eyes compassionately*)

O my king!

Ask me not to tell
What thou dost ask me—
That canst thou never know.

(*he turns toward Isolde, who has raised her eyes to him with ardent longing*)

Whither Tristan is going now
Wilt thou, Isolde,
Go with him too?
The land that Tristan means
Knows not the light of the sun,
It is that mystic land
Of darksome night,
From whence my mother bore me—
When me, to whom death gave her,
Dying, she left behind, —
First saw the light
Where, when she bore me,
Was Love's mountain-top,
The dream-land of night,
From which I once woke,
There Tristan calls thee,
Thither he goes before—
Now, let Isolde say,
If, brave and true,
She dares to follow.

ISOLDE

When thou, long time ago,
To a strange land,
Traitor and friend,—
Yet true and kind,—
Asked Isolde to voyage,
Did she not go?
Now, when thou askest her
To thine own kingdom,
Dost think that I shall fear
That land of all lands
Which bridges the worlds?
Wherever Tristan is,
His house and home,
There will Isolde lodge.
Him whom she follows,
Loyal and gentle,
Let him now show the way
Unto Isolde!

(*Tristan bends over her and kisses her tenderly upon the forehead. Melot rushes up in fury*)

MELOT

(*drawing his sword*)

Thou traitor!
Avenge thee, my king!
Wilt thou endure this slight?

TRISTAN

(*drawing his sword and turning quickly round*)
Who stakes his life 'gainst mine?
(*he fixes his gaze upon Melot*)
Why, he was once my friend!
Often he told me
How he did love me, —
How near his heart
Was my honour and fame!
'T was he filled my heart with pride,
And urged me, Isolde,
More honour to gain,
By thy wedding the king!
Isolde, thine eyes
Dazzled him also;
Jealous, — that made him false
To me, as I to the king.
(*he advances on Melot*)
Melot! on guard!
(*as Melot makes himself ready for the encounter, with brandished sword, Tristan's sword falls to the ground, and he sinks, wounded, into the arms of Kurwenal. Isolde throws herself upon his breast. Marke holds Melot back. The curtain falls quickly*)

ACT III

(*The garden of a castle. On one side the towering battlements, on the other, a low wall, breast-high, broken by a watch-tower; in the background the castle gate. The situation is on a rocky headland and, through the spaces between the buildings, a wide expanse of sea is visible; the general aspect is that of a place half deserted, ill cared for, here and there in ruins, which grass and ivy have overgrown*)

Act III, scene i

(*In the foreground, within the low wall, under the shadow of a lofty linden, lies Tristan, stretched out in sleep, as if lifeless, upon a couch. At his head sits Kurwenal, bending sadly over him, and anxiously listening to his breathing. The sound of a shepherd's pipe is heard without the wall, over which presently the shepherd leans with an air of interest and inquiry*)

SHEPHERD

KURWENAL!
Kurwenal!
Tell me, my friend,
Wakes he not yet?

KURWENAL

(*turns toward the shepherd, and shakes his head sadly*)

Ah! if he awoke,
It were only to leave us;
Forever to go;
Unless the witch-woman,
She, the enchantress,

All charms and simples,
Would give us her aid!
Is there no ship
Yonder, yet on the sea?

SHEPHERD

Ah! quite another tune
Thou wouldst then hear!
The lustiest love song
That joy ever made!
But, tell me truly,
What is the sorrow,
Old friend, of our lord?

KURWENAL

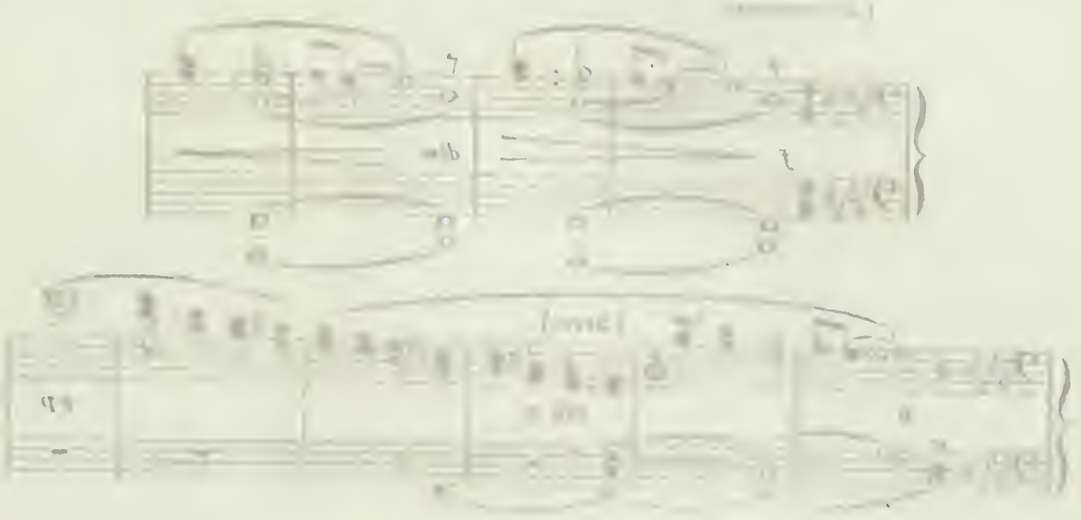
Ask not that question,—
That thou canst never know.
Watch thou the sea,
And when thou see'st a ship
Strike up a merry tune!

SHEPHERD

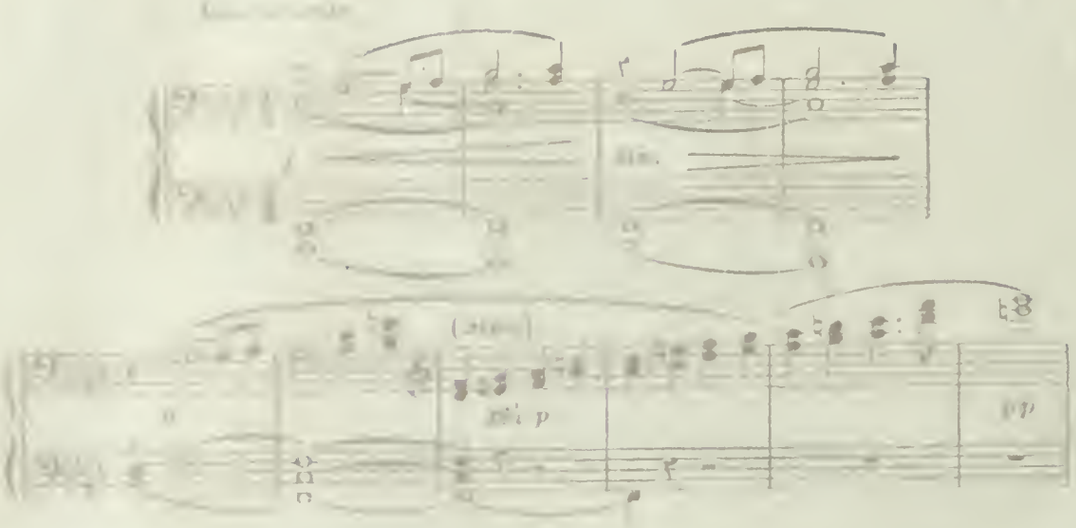
(*turning round and scanning the sea; his hand shading his eyes*)

The sea is waste and drear.

(*he puts his reed to his mouth, and goes away piping*)



SOLITUDE



"The sea is waste and drear."

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TRISTAN

(*motionless — speaking faintly*)

What is that ancient glee,
That old song that waked me?
(*opens his eyes, and slightly turns his head*)
Where am I?

KURWENAL

(*starting up in joyous agitation*)

Ha! is it thy voice?
Can it be Tristan,
My hero and lord?

TRISTAN

(*with effort*)

Who is it calls me?

KURWENAL

Life calls thee at last, —
Life, life, O sweet life!
Given to Tristan,
All springtime at last.

TRISTAN

(*faintly*)

Is it thou, Kurwenal?
Where was I?
Where am I?

KURWENAL

Where art thou?
In peace and all quiet,
Tranquil and safe—
Kareol, lord!
Dost thou not know
The home of thy fathers?

TRISTAN

My fathers?

KURWENAL

Look but around thee!

TRISTAN

What sound was it roused me?

KURWENAL

The pipe of the shepherd—
Dost thou not hear it still?
Yonder upon the mountain,
He tends thy flocks.

TRISTAN

My flocks?

KURWENAL

My lord, I say it!
Thine house and thine home,
Courtyard and towers,
Hearthstone and herd,
Thy faithful retainers
Have guarded for thee,
Their trusted lord,
As best they were able —
Which, when he went away,
To a far land to sail,
He on his people freely bestowed.

TRISTAN

What was the land?

KURWENAL

Why, it was Cornwall,
Whence all there was of joy
And fortune and glory,
Tristan, so brave and bright,
Took for himself.

TRISTAN

Am I in Cornwall?

KURWENAL

No, thou art only in Kareol.

TRISTAN

How did I come here?

KURWENAL

Heigho! how comest thou here?
What steed didst thou ride?
'T was no horse that carried thee,
Only a little ship, —
And 't was on my shoulders —
Broad enough shoulders —
Thou landed — on land,
Stood on the shore,
Once more at home,
On thine own ground,
Pleasaunce and pasture,
And the old well-known sun —
Where and by which
All thy wounds shall be healed.
(*he leans caressingly on Tristan's shoulder*)

TRISTAN

Canst thou think so?
I know 't is a lie —
Let it seem so to thee!
When I awakened

Truly I know not
Where I had lodging!
Or where I lodged
How can I tell thee!
The sun shone not there
In the land I abode in,
The green earth I saw not,
Nor any people;
Yet what I did see
How can I tell thee!
Where I have always been,
Whither I go forever,
To that eternal realm
Of lasting sleep
There the one thought I had—
Forgetfulness ever,
Always oblivion.
How gone away from me
All boding dreams!
An impulse, a longing—
Shall I so call it?—
Into the light of day
Drove me again.
That which alone was left,
Love's golden fire,

Drove me away
From Death's strange embrace —
And now into the light once more
Drives me, Isolde.
O thou deceiving day,
So bright and so golden,
That shines on Isolde;
O thou ill-omened day,
Wilt thy gleam always
Awaken my fair?
O will it always burn,
This torch of day
That keeps us apart?
Ah! Isolde!
My sweet one, all gracious,
All treasure!
Ah! when, at last!
Ah! when! Ah! when!
Wilt thou blow out
That flickering gleam
That our joy may enkindle?
The light, how late it shines!
When will the house go sleep!

(*his voice more and more weary, he sinks back, exhausted*)

KURWENAL

(*who has been trembling with emotion, arises*)

Her whom I once defied,
Through truth to thee,
For her I long as thou—
Take thou my word,
Her shalt thou see,
Here and to-day!
This solace I can give thee—
If she dwells still in life.

TRISTAN

(*very faintly*)

The light has not yet paled,
Nor is the house yet dark:
Isolde lives and waits for me,
She calls me through the night.

KURWENAL

If she but lives,
Then let hope smile on thee—
If poor dull-pated Kurwenal
Has seemed of little worth,
To-day thou canst not gird him.
Still as the dead
Hast thou lain,

Since that day, when Melot—
Melot, accurséd—
Dealt thee that blow;
Ah, that foul blow!
Ah, how to heal it!
Then, fool that I am,
There came this thought to me:
She who once healed
The wounds Morold made,
Once more could heal thee,
Best of all leeches.
Her I soon found,
And unto Cornwall
A trusty servant
Sails o'er the sea
To bring thee—Isolde.

TRISTAN

(*beside himself*)

Isolde is coming!
Isolde is near!

(*he struggles for words*)

O friendship, high and pure,
O loyal, faithful friend!

(*draws Kurwenal to him and embraces him*)

My Kurwenal!
My friend, my friend!
Ah, how can Tristan thank thee!
My shield and my shelter!
In all my battles,
My joy and my sorrow,
Thou always by me!
Those whom I hate
Thou hatest too;
Those whom I love
Thou lovest also.
When kind King Marke
I loyally served,
Thou too wert true to him,
True as fine gold;
When I was false to him,
Thou wert false too;
Thou hast forgotten thyself
For my sake,
And, when I suffer,
Thou sufferest also;
But *what* I suffer
How canst thou know?
O all this aching
That burns up my heart,

This devouring longing;
Were I to tell it thee,
Couldst thou once know it,
Thou wouldst not tarry here.
Nay! thou wouldst hasten
Up to the watch-tower,
To gaze o'er the sea,
With all thy strained senses,
Longingly looking
Where the sails of her ship
Swell on the breeze;
Where, far before the winds,
Driven by burning love,
Isolde steers towards me.
Why see! it is coming—
Nearer and nearer,
As swift as her heart,
And see how the flags wave
There on the mast!
Her ship! her ship!
At last on the beach
It grinds—
Canst thou not see it?
Kurwenal, canst thou not see?

(*while Kurwenal, unwilling to leave Tristan,*

hesitates and lingers, and Tristan looks toward him with mute intentness, there is heard, as at first, the plaintive piping of the shepherd)

KURWENAL

(*dejectedly*)

Still there is no ship in sight.

TRISTAN

(*who has been listening with waning agitation; now, again, with growing melancholy*)

Ah! thou old-time ditty,
Was that thy meaning?
All sighs and sorrow;
Sadly enough it sounded to me
What time it told me
My father was dead!
Yet far more woeful
When in the grey of dawn
I heard that she
Who gave me birth,
And he who begat me,
Had died, that I should live,
Giving to me their breath.
Unto them also,
Through all their pain,
Came singing that old song,

All made out of longing,
Which asked long ago,
And still sings and asks me,
What was I born for;
What fate and what fortune?
It is the old refrain.
Once more it tells me
To yearn — and to die.
(*he sinks back exhausted*)

KURWENAL

(*who has been striving in vain to calm Tristan, cries out in anguish*)

Tristan! my master!
O the witchcraft of loving!
The terrible power,
The cruel enchantment,
The tyrant illusion
That we call — love!
Listen what those fair dreams,
Listen what love has done,
For him the noblest knight.
Ah! dream so fair —
What hast thou done!
Here my true hero lies,
Loved as none else is —

Say, what reward has love
Given him for loving —
Say, what reward
Does love ever give!
(*with sobs in his voice*)
Art thou dead?
Art thou still alive?
Or has her witchcraft
Borne thee away?
(*he listens to Tristan's breathing*)
Joy! he still breathes,
Lives still, and softly
Moveth his lips!

TRISTAN
(*beginning very softly*)
The ship!
Is it in sight yet?

KURWENAL
The ship?
'T is on the way,
Nearer and nearer
It sails and sails,
And soon 't will be here —

TRISTAN

Ah, see Isolde
There on the deck!
See how she smiles,
With the cup in her hand,
The cup of forgiveness!
Canst thou not see her?
Canst thou not see her now?
All grace and all goodness,
How like a flower
She floats on the sea!
On the sea-flowers,
The soft flying foam,
And in the billows' arms,
She is coming to me!
O the peace of her smile!
The solace to see her!
The one last draught — 't is sleep —
Isolde brings me!
Isolde! Isolde!
How lovely thou art,
How fair, my Isolde!
How fair, ah! how fair!
But, Kurwenal!
How strange thou saw her not!

Hast thou no eyes?
Up to the watch-tower,
Idiot, unseeing thing,
That which, all shining,
I see so clear,
Mark that thou see'st too!
Dost thou not hear me?
Up to the watch-tower!
Wilt thou not heed me?
The ship, the ship!
Isolde's ship!
Surely thou see'st it!
Her ship — dost thou see it?

(*whilst Kurwenal, still hesitating, opposes Tristan, the shepherd's pipe is heard without*)

KURWENAL

(*springing joyously up*)
Joy!
(*he rushes to the watch-tower and looks out*)
The ship!
I see her sailing
Down from the North!

TRISTAN

I knew, and I said it!

Yes! Yes! she lives
And gives me back
My life again!
How could Isolde,
Who is my whole world,
Escape from this world?

KURWENAL
(*shouting*)

Hurrah! Hurrah!
How bravely she keeps her course!
How the wind fills her sails!
How they swell out!
How she sails—how she flies!

TRISTAN

The pennon? The pennon?

KURWENAL

The flag of joy
Floats from the mast.

TRISTAN

O happiness!
All shining in the sun,
Isolde comes to me.
See'st thou not her?

KURWENAL

The ship is hidden
Behind the rocks.

TRISTAN

Behind the rocks?
Is there no danger?
Those angry breakers
Have wrecked many ships;
Who 's at the helm?

KURWENAL

A seaman the surest.

TRISTAN

Has he betrayed me?
Is he Melot's ally?

KURWENAL

Trust him, as thou wouldst me.

TRISTAN

Trust a traitor as thou!
O caitiff!
Canst thou not see her yet?

KURWENAL

Not yet.

TRISTAN

All lost!

KURWENAL

Bravo!
She is past the bar,
Happily past it,
Safely within the river
The ship comes to port.

TRISTAN

(*shouting for joy*)
Halloo! Kurwenal!
True friend indeed!
All that I have
Is thine, is thine inheritance!

KURWENAL

Swiftly they come.

TRISTAN

Now canst thou see her?
See'st thou Isolde?

KURWENAL

Yea! it is she;
She waves her hand.

TRISTAN

O hallowed woman!

KURWENAL

The ship is ashore;
Isolde!
With one leap she springs
Lightly to land.

TRISTAN

Down from the watch-tower,
Indolent gazer;
Go to the shore,
And help my love to land.

KURWENAL

Fear not — I will bring her,
Trust my strong arms —
But, Tristan, thou promise
Stay peacefully here —
(*he hastens away*)

TRISTAN

(*tossing on his couch in feverish excitement*)
O this sun!
This fair day!
Sun-filled day

Of all bliss!
Blood racing wildly,
Heart shouting for joy!
Condemned to this couch,
How can I endure it?
Up and fly yonder
Where brave hearts
Are beating.
Tristan, the hero,
Exulting in power,
From death
Thus hath torn him.
(*he raises himself erect*)
All bleeding and wounded,
I fought once with Morold;
All bleeding and wounded
Isolde I 'll greet.
(*he tears the bandage from his wound*)
Ha, ha! my blood!
Lustily flows it.
(*he springs down from his couch and totters forward*)
She who can close my wound
For me forever,
She comes like a hero,

To heal me she comes!
Let the world fade away
With the speed of my joy!
(*he staggers toward the middle of the stage*)

ISOLDE

(*from without*)
Tristan! Tristan! Beloved!

TRISTAN

(*in terrible excitement*)
Hark! I hear the light calling!
Ha! — the torch!
The torch has gone out!
To her! to her!

Act III, scene ii

(*Isolde, breathless, rushes in. Tristan, no longer master of himself, hastens unsteadily toward her. They meet in the middle of the stage; Isolde folds him in her arms*)

ISOLDE

TRISTAN! Tristan!

TRISTAN

(*looking up to Isolde with dying gaze*)

T Isolde!

(*he dies*)

ISOLDE

It is I! It is I!
Sweetest friend,
It is I!
O rise up once more!
O hearken my cry!
Heedest not?—'T is Isolde!
'T is Isolde that calls thee!
Isolde is come

With her Tristan to die.
Art thou mute still to me?
An hour!
One short hour,
Awaken for me!
Ah! the days never-ending
She lay awake longing
That, but for one hour,
She might waken with thee!
Dost thou cheat thy Isolde,
Does Tristan defraud her
Of this, our one fleeting,
Eternal, last joy
Together on earth?
But his wound!
Ah, where is it?
First let me heal it,
That, exalted and happy,
The night we may share.
Not from thy wound
Must thou die,
Not thy wound,
And leave me.
Nay, for us two together
Must our light of life fade!

How dimmed are his eyes!
Ah! how still is his heart!
Faithless Tristan — couldst thou
Strike Isolde this blow?
Not the fleeting sigh
Of one breath!
Must she now before thee
Stand wailing, who all joyous
To wed thee, stout-hearted,
Came over the sea?
Too late! too late!
Arrogant man,
Dost thou punish me thus
With banishment cruel?
Is there no grace
For the guilt of my passion?
May I not speak
Even my sorrow to thee?
Only once!
Once again!
Ah, Tristan!
Hist! he wakes!
My beloved —
— Night!
(*she sinks unconscious upon Tristan's body*)

Act III, scene iii

(*Kurwenal, who had immediately followed Isolde, has remained at the gate in speechless agitation, with his eyes intently fixed upon Tristan. From below is now heard a dull, confused sound of voices and the creaking of armour. The shepherd climbs over the wall*)

SHEPHERD

(*in a low voice, hurriedly, turning toward Kurwenal*)

KURWENAL! Hark ye!
Another ship!

(*Kurwenal starts up quickly and looks over the rampart; meanwhile, the shepherd, standing apart, and trembling with consternation, gazes on Tristan and Isolde*)

KURWENAL

Death and Hell!
(*in a burst of anger*)
Have everything to hand!

Marke and Melot
Have I caught sight of
Weapons and stones?
Help me! To the gate!
(*he and the shepherd rush to the gate, which they try to shut*)

THE STEERSMAN
(*rushing in*)
Marke is upon us
With troops and attendants;
Defence is vain!
We are overpowered.

KURWÉNAL
Stand to and help!
As long as I live
No one steals in here!

BRANGÄNA'S VOICE
(*without, calling from below*)
Isolde! My Lady!

KURWENAL
Brangäna's voice!
(*calling down*)
What seekest thou here?

BRANGÄNA

Close not the gate, Kurwenal!
Where is Isolde?

KURWENAL

Thou too, traitress!
Woe to thee, accursed one!

MELOT'S VOICE

(*without*)

Back, thou fool!
Bar not the way!

KURWENAL

(*laughing savagely*)

Ha! Ha! here's to the day
That I at last meet thee!

(*Melot, with men-at-arms, appears before the gate. Kurwenal rushes upon him, and strikes him to the ground*)

Die, infamous wretch!

Act III, scene iv

MELOT

WOE 'S me! — Tristan!
(*he dies*)

BRANGÄNA
(*still without the wall*)
Kurwenal! madman!
O hear, thou 'rt deluded!

KURWENAL
Faithless maid!
(*to his men*)
Up! follow me!
Throw them back!
(*they fight*)

MARKE
(*without*)
Hold, madman!
Art bereft of thy senses?

KURWENAL

Here death only rages!
Nothing else, O king,
Is here to be had!
Wouldst thou choose it — then come!
(*he sets upon Marke and his followers*)

MARKE

Back, deluded fool!

BRANGÄNA

(*has climbed over the wall at side and hastens to the front*)
Isolde! my mistress!
Joy to thee, and safety!
Ah! what do I see?
Art thou living? Isolde!
(*she moves in anguish about Isolde*)

MARKE

(*who, with his followers, has driven back Kurwenal and his men from the gate, and forced his way in*)
O deceit and delusion!
Tristan, where art thou?

KURWENAL

(*fatally wounded, staggers to the front, before Marke*)

There lies he — there —
Here where I lie —
(*he sinks down at Tristan's feet*)

MARKE

Tristan! Tristan!
Isolde! Woe!

KURWENAL

(*reaching toward Tristan's hand*)

Tristan! dear heart!
Blame me not
That I, faithful, — go with thee!
(*he dies*)

MARKE

Dead then all!
All dead?
My hero! my Tristan!
Dearest friend!
Yet must thou again to-day
Betray thy friend!
Even to-day when he comes

With new pledge of his faith.
Awake! awake!
Awake to the cry of my grief,
Unfaithful, most faithful friend!
(*he bends sobbing over the bodies*)

BRANGÄNA
(*who has brought Isolde back to life in her arms*)
She wakes! she lives!
Isolde, hear!
Hear me, sweetest of ladies!
Happy news
Have I for thee!
Wilt not trust thy Brangäna?
Her witless guilt
She hath atoned.
When thou hadst gone
Quickly she found the king;
Scarce learned he the secret
Of the magical potion
Than, all anguish and haste,
He stood off to sea,
Thee to catch up with,
Thee to renounce,
And conduct to thy friend.

MARKE

O wherefore, Isolde,
All this woe for me?
For, when clearly unveiled,
What before I could know not,
What joy 't was to find
My friend free from all stain!
To this hero to wed thee,
This man pure and sacred.
With winged sails
I flew after thee:
But misfortune,
Mad fury,
Overtakes all too swiftly
The bringer of peace!
Death's harvest I increased:
Delusion made more woe.

BRANGÄNA

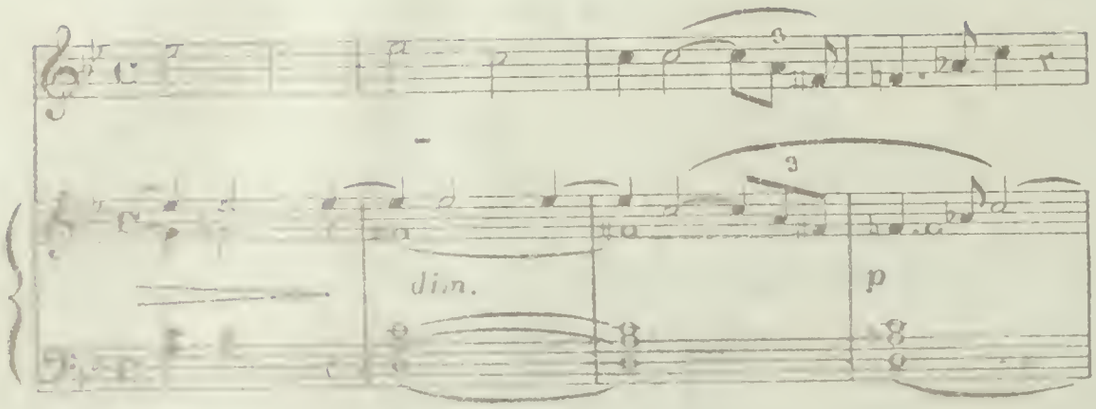
Dost thou not hear us?
Isolde! Dear one!
Dost thou not grasp the truth?

ISOLDE

(*who has been unconscious of what has passed around her, fixes her gaze upon the body of*

dim.

THE LOVE DEATH



"Mark you how he
Rises radiant,
Lifts himself,
All clothed in starlight!"

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Tristan, transported with an ever-increasing ecstasy)

O how gently
He is smiling,
See his eyelids
Open softly,
See how brightly
He is shining!
See, you, friends—
O see you not?
Mark you how he
Rises radiant,
Lifts himself,
All clothed in starlight!
See, you, friends—
O see you not?
How his mighty heart
Is swelling,
Calm and happy,
In his breast!
From his lips
How sweet an incense
Softly breathes!
O hearken, friends—
Hear ye nothing,

Feel ye nought!
It is I alone
That listen
To this music
Strangely gentle,
Love-persuading,
Saying all things;
To this music
From him coming,
Through me like
A trumpet thrilling,
Round me like
An ocean surging,
O'er me like
An ocean flowing!
Are these waves
About me breezes?
Are these odours
Fragrant billows?
How they gleam
And sing about me.
Shall I breathe,
O shall I listen?
Shall I drink,
O shall I dive

Deep beneath them—
Breathe my last?
In the billows,
In the music,
In the world's
Great whirlwind—lost;
Sinking,
Drowning,
Dreamless,
Blest.

(*Isolde, as if glorified by her ecstasy, sinks gently down, supported by Brangäna, upon the body of Tristan. Great emotion and grief among the bystanders. Marke extends his hands in blessing over the dead*)

(*The curtain falls slowly*)

CHAPTER I

WAGNER THE EXILE

CHAPTER I

WAGNER THE EXILE

"AS I HAVE NEVER IN MY life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head *Tristan and Isolde*, the simplest but most full-blooded musical conception; with the 'black flag' which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die."

This is the first burst of confidence, regarding the project of "Tristan und Isolde," which escaped Wagner. It occurred in a letter written

to the man who was his artistic champion and his unfailing friend, Franz Liszt, to whom Wagner owed an unwritten debt of huge proportions; and the date of this missive is 1854.

Making full allowance for the flow of emotional sentiment which punctuated Wagner's life, there is still something pathetic in the above quotation. At the time of its writing Wagner was an exile — both politically and artistically. He had been banished from Germany for his share in the Dresden uprising of 1849, when, although a conductor at the Dresden Royal Opera, he had joined the multitude in their revolt against the King of Saxony. It was an ill-advised action, and in later years, when admitting that he had participated in the rebellion, Wagner explained that he had been carried away by his passions. It was more than impetuousness, however; for in those stormy days he wrote his essay "Art and Revolution," in which he dilated upon the artistic and political reforms possible. In a word, the spell of reform was then upon Wagner; and in his anxiety to reform the

theatre or the opera house he was theoretically quite willing that the whole plan of government should be reformed if necessary. When, on that historic May Day, the thunderbolt fell and the King of Saxony dissolved the diet, Wagner was among the rebels. His friends and enemies of later years have never been able to agree how active, in rebellion, the young opera conductor had been in those days, and it is not of sufficient interest here to discuss the matter. The fact remains that when the Prussian troops entered Dresden and put the rebels to rout, Wagner escaped to Liszt, at that time but an acquaintance, in Weimar; and when the government took steps to make him captive, he fled again, this time to Zurich. Following a vain hope that, with the door of political and artistic Germany closed in his face, France would grant him the dreamed-of opportunities, Wagner was soon again a wanderer headed for Paris. Here he was promptly and effectually disillusioned, and returned to Zurich in 1850, where, with the exception of a visit to London five years later, and some petty excursions, he remained until 1858. It was here that he

met and loved Mathilde Wesendonck, and here that the poem and a great part of the music of "Tristan und Isolde" came to be born.

No stretch of the imagination can make Wagner's first years in Zurich appear as happy ones. His one artistic hope was Liszt, who was striving to produce "Lohengrin" at Weimar, and did succeed in 1850. Beyond that all was blackness of despair—and dreams and schemes. The poems of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and some prose writings—principally "Judaism and Music" and "Opera and Drama"—occupied his time partially; and in addition he conducted some concerts and a few sporadic opera performances, including his own "Der Fliegende Holländer." The artistic material available for these performances appears to have been of doubtful quality, and Wagner's joy in these affairs must have been meagre. The only detail that seems worth recording in relation to his activities as conductor in Zurich is the fact that he had as assistants Hans von Bülow and Karl Ritter, the former of whom was destined afterward

to play an important role in Wagner's artistic life. More than that, twenty years later Wagner married Cosima, divorced wife of Hans von Bülow.

To return to the early Zurich days. Wagner was not robust in health, and his spirits sank under the thralldom of mental depression. He was not happy with Minna Wagner, who had little patience and sympathy with her husband's seemingly impractical schemes. The wolf was frequently at the door, and Wagner chafed under it all with the impatience of genius. "Tiresome visitors" — "new acquaintances have forced themselves upon me" — "company that tortures me, and before which I withdraw to torture myself" — these are some of Wagner's remarks to be found in letters of those days; but the most pathetic remark is one referring to Minna's enjoying herself with her own set while Wagner was at home, "sitting lone on the couch, staring at the lamp." All this proves, however much it is discounted and however much allowance is made for his quick self-pity, that Wagner was also an exile from the companionship he craved.

"My dearest, dearest unique Franz," he wrote to Liszt in 1854, "give me the heart, the spirit, the mind of a woman in which I could *wholly* sink myself, which could quite comprehend me. How little should I then ask of this world." This letter is a significant expression of Wagner's longing for appreciative companionship, and yet, at the time of its writing, he had known Mathilde Wesendonck for two years! The sparse collection of notes and letters written by him to Mathilde Wesendonck during the early years of their acquaintance, 1852–3, would seem to indicate the existence of a casual friendship only; although he must have been impressed by the Wesendonck at first meeting, in 1852, for he writes to his friend Uhlig a few days after this meeting: ". . . ever and again it is the 'eternal womanly' that fills me with sweet illusion and warm thrills of joy-in-life. The glistening moisture of a woman's eye often saturates me with fresh hope again."

From the beginning of this friendship, 1852, until April, 1857, when Wagner's period of exile was temporarily brought to a close, the

published letters from Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck are of very slight interest. There are here no expressions of great intimacy; he addresses her as "friend" and its variants when he does not employ more formal terms. But their friendship during this period has been recorded by the initials that were traced in pencil at the head of the sketch for the Prelude to the opening act of "Die Walküre": "G . . . . . s . . M . . . . . ," which is to be interpreted: "Gesegnet sei Mathilde" ("Blessed be Mathilde").

It would also appear that we owe the present version of "Eine Faust Overtüre" to the Wesendonck, for its revision — now its present form — was undertaken by Wagner following her desire to hear this work, which composition originally dates from the Paris days of 1840. In its old form the Overture became unsatisfying to Wagner, and he set about to recast it completely. In a letter to Franz Liszt, dated January 19, 1855, he writes: "It is an absurd coincidence that just at this time I have been taken with a desire to remodel my old *Faust* overture. I have made an entirely new

score, have rewritten the instrumentation throughout, have made many changes, and have given more expansion and importance to the middle portion (second motive). I shall give it in a few days at a concert here, under the title of 'A *Faust* Overture.' The motto will be:

'The God that in my breast is owned
Can deeply stir the inner sources;
The God above my powers enthroned,
He cannot change external forces,
So, by the burden of my days oppressed,
Death is desired, and Life a thing unblest!'[1]

but I shall not publish it in any case."

Wagner intended to dedicate the publication of this revised version to Mathilde Wesendonck, —so Mr. William Ashton Ellis tells us,—but its sombre motto persuaded him from this sign of homage. "Impossible," cried Wagner to the Wesendonck, "to pin that fearful motto to your breast!" So he compromised by inscribing the music with: "R. W. Zürich, 17 Jan. 1855 zum Andenken S. I. F." Dr. Golter, the editor of the German edition of the

[1] This quotation is from Goethe's "Faust," Act I, Scene 4, and the translation used here is by Bayard Taylor.

Wesendonck letters, takes the latter part of this inscription to mean: "Zum Andenken Seiner lieben Frau" ("In remembrance of his dear wife"); but this must obviously be an error! So we find a ready solution to the puzzle by accepting Mr. Ellis' version, in which the three initials are interpreted: "Seiner lieben Freundin" ("his dear friend").

So, too, did Wagner compose for her the Album Sonate, in E flat major; but there was obviously little or no sentiment about this bit of writing, for it was composed in payment of a debt, — a sum of money which Otto Wesendonck had advanced. It is inscribed: "Sonate for Mathilde Wesendonck," and there is added as a motto the quotation from the Norn Scene in the Prologue of "Götterdämmerung": "Wisst Ihr wie das wird?" ("Knowst thou what will happen?"). Musically this Sonate is interesting principally because it was Wagner's first composition since the completion of "Lohengrin," which had been achieved six years previously.

Outward signs of greater intimacy between Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck during this

stretch of years are without records; and yet we have Wagner's own words to the effect that during all the time of his acquaintance with the Wesendonck she was, from the first, a factor and an influence in his life. He expresses this in a letter written to his sister, Clara Wolfram, in 1858, and its remarkable frankness is amazing: "What for six years has supported, comforted, and strengthened me withal to stay by Minna's side, despite the enormous differences of our character and disposition, is the love of that young gentlewoman who at first and for long approached me shyly, diffidently, hesitant and timid, but thereafter more and more decidedly and surely. . . . Since the very commencement of our acquaintance she has felt the most unflagging and refined solicitude for me. . . ."

As for Mathilde Wesendonck, she admitted that when she met Wagner she was "a blank page." And upon this page Richard Wagner inscribed the music-drama of "Tristan und Isolde."

Let a few facts about this interesting woman suffice. Mathilde Luckemeyer was born at

Elberfeld in 1828, thus being fifteen years Wagner's junior. Her father was in commerce, and the family removed to Düsseldorf soon after Mathilde's birth. There and at Dunkirk the young girl was educated; and in 1848 —about the time when Wagner was writing the poem of "Siegfried's Death"—she married Otto Wesendonck, a widower, thirteen years older than herself. In the following year a son was born to them, but he lived only a few months. Then the couple came to America to look after the interests of a New York silk business of which he was a partner, and returning to Europe in 1851, settled in Zurich, where his business occupied him. Four years later they began to build the big villa on the "Green Hill," in the suburb of Zurich, which they occupied, with interruptions, from 1857 until 1872. After that they lived in various cities, Otto Wesendonck dying in 1896, while Mathilde Wesendonck lived until 1902. During the stay in Zurich one daughter and three sons were born to the Wesendoncks.

Mathilde Wesendonck was a woman of no mean mental capacity. She was the author

of the following works: "Gudrun," a five-act drama; "Odysseus," a dramatic poem; "Alkestis," in four acts; "Friedrich der Grosse," a drama; "Edith oder die Schlacht bei Hastings," a five-act tragedy; "Baldur-Mythos," after the younger Edda; "Kalypso, ein Vorspiel," "Natur-Mythen"; "Gedichte, Volksweisen, Legenden und Sagen"; "Märchen und Märchenspiele," and some "Puppenspiele." William Ashton Ellis, translator of Wagner's Prose Works, and editor of the English version of the Wagner-Wesendonck correspondence, points out the fact that none of these works was written before Mathilde Wesendonck met Wagner, and none was published until after her correspondence with Wagner had practically ceased; also does he detect in her writings traces of Wagner's phraseology.

None of the more ambitious of these writings has achieved world-wide celebrity; but posterity knows and will continue to know the name of Mathilde Wesendonck through her authorship of the poems of the five famous songs for which Wagner composed the music; namely: "Der Engel," "Stehe Still!" "Im

Treibhaus," "Schmerzen," and "Träume." The music of two of these—"Träume" and "Im Treibhaus"—was used as sketches for two important musical incidents in "Tristan und Isolde," and were inscribed as such by Wagner.

To judge by a reproduction of a portrait of the Wesendonck, dated 1860, she was a woman of regular features and Madonna-like expression. Her face indicates great refinement, and in her eye there lurks a sentimental, tender gleam. Her interest in art matters appeared to be keen, and her personality is described as having been one possessing excessive charm.

Beside Mathilde Wesendonck, Minna Wagner must have cut rather a sorry figure in every way. Contrasted point by point, her shortcomings of intellect and appreciation emphasized by her poverty, Minna Wagner could scarcely have been a rival in the duel for Wagner's love, waged between her and the Wesendonck. But is it necessary for Mr. Ellis, in his introductory and valedictory notes to the book of Wagner-Wesendonck letters, to

draw so disparaging a pen portrait of Minna Wagner? He finds that she has less wit than is usually to be discovered in a lady's maid; but he admits, with almost the same breath, that she confined her energies to "inside management, the washtub and kitchen." It would seem that a more dispassionate view of the case would be juster, and probably nearer the real truth. Wagner, with his struggles, his ills and his fits of moodiness, was probably not the most bearable of mates. When he was in the throes of misfortune, during his earlier restive days when moneys were uncertain and irregular, then Minna, confining her energies to "washtub and kitchen," was probably just the sort of a wife Wagner needed. She served her purpose — to state the case quite brutally; but then Wagner outgrew her. During those days at Zurich, when Wagner had his life's work still before him, Minna was doubtless near the end of her tether of endurance and patience and hopes. And at this crucial time there stepped into the arena Mathilde Wesendonck, outwardly a "blank page," though inwardly charged with ideals,

untrained but eager. The battle was, from the start, unfair; and the advantage was all on the side of the Wesendonck.

I trust I may not be suspected of trying to moralise on this love affair, nor of attempting to wield the cudgel for Minna Wagner. There is one point only that I cannot understand, and that is why the two did not separate. She was weary of her marital bargain, as was Wagner; and at the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary of their wedding she wrote: "If I could cross these twenty-five years out of my life, perhaps I might be merry again"; while Wagner admits quite as frankly that she "would have been happier with a lesser man." But the legal ties were dissolved only by her death, in 1866, although Mr. Ellis eagerly states that during the Zurich days "Minna had long ceased to be a wife in anything but name, since she and her husband now met at little more than meal-times."

There was, however, a fourth person in this battle, and he was seriously to be reckoned with. This was Otto Wesendonck. Mr. Ellis finds him a knight in deeds; but, admitting

that he had a pronounced taste for a good house and for good pictures to hang in it, he leaps to the conclusion that "he had not cultivated any great relish for reading." And yet Wagner, after an acquaintance of two years, sends him a book and the following naïve letter: "Homer was stealing out of my library. Whither? I asked. He replied: To congratulate Otto Wesendonck on his birthday. I answered: Do't for me, as well!" As a matter of fact, Otto Wesendonck appears to have been a man of culture and of fine forbearance. He gave Wagner unstinted assistance at a time when it was most needed; and even more than that, he provided him [Wagner] with a home. While Wesendonck was building his villa on the "Green Hill," he secured a neighbouring house for Wagner. In writing to his sister, Clara, Wagner speaks of this incident, giving Mathilde the credit for having obtained the house for him: "Thus, whereas he [Wesendonck] was consumed with jealousy himself, she [Mathilde] was able so to interest him in me again, that—as you are aware—he oftentimes assisted me; and when it became at last

a question of procuring me a little house with a garden after my own wish, it was she who by dint of the most unheard-of battles won him round to buy for me the pretty premises beside his own."

Wagner had, years before, expressed to Otto Wesendonck a heartfelt wish to possess a tiny house with a garden, and even asked his friends' interception in his behalf to acquire the lease of a piece of available property. This fell through, and a bit later there sprang up the hope of finding a home in Weimar, under the protection of the Grand Duke Karl Alexander, which plan was of course fathered by Liszt, but which also came to nought. Finally, during the early months of 1857, Wagner received a letter from Otto Wesendonck announcing that he had bought the Zurich property, and that this was to be placed at Wagner's disposal as a home. Wagner's reply is touching, replete with sentimental gratitude, and full of the happiness of the promise of peace that unfolded itself in contemplation of this generosity. On an earlier occasion, when Wesendonck had proposed to Wagner

that he act both as his patron and publisher, Wagner had written, with fine impulse: "If this can be brought about and if I ever play an important role in the history of art, then you surely shall not occupy a minor position. . . ." And now, with overflowing gratitude, he writes down the sentiment aroused by the offer of a home, with its perspective of contentment and happiness: "Oh, Children! You will be satisfied with me, — certainly that you shall be — for I belong to you for the rest of my life; and my successes, even my happiness and my productivity will gratify me, for I will tend and nurture them so that they may give you pleasure!"

Into this house, which he called the "Asyl," Wagner and his wife moved in April, 1857. At last, after years of wandering, he had found a home, and it looked as though his period of exile was at an end. He had secured a patron and a roof over his head, a place which was to shelter him until death. Here, in the "Asyl," he hoped to find the peace necessary for the creation of the mighty music-dramas that thundered in his brain. But it was a

false hope, and the lull of happiness was but the moment of breathless cosmic suspension before the bolt crashes into eternity. In this moment, however, "Tristan and Isolde" was conceived.

CHAPTER II

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: RICHARD WAGNER AND MATHILDE WESENDONCK

"With my poetic conceptions I have been so far ahead of my experiences, that I may consider my moral development as almost exclusively induced and brought about by those conceptions; Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Nibelungs, Wodan — all existed earlier in my head than my experience. But the marvellous relation in which I stand to the Tristan now, you will easily perceive yourself: I say it openly, since it is an observation due to the initiated mind, though not to the world, that never has an idea so definitely passed into experience." — *Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck, January 19, 1859.*

CHAPTER II

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE: RICHARD WAGNER AND MATHILDE WESENDONCK

TOWARD THE CLOSE OF April, 1857, the Wagners took possession of the "Asyl." Let us accept Wagner's own brief description of its arrangement, as he imparted it to Liszt, early in the following month: "Ten days ago we moved into the little country-seat you know of, beside the Wesendoncks' villa, which I owe to the truly great sympathy of this friendly family. . . . The fitting of the little house, which certainly has turned out very neat and

to my mind, required much time. . . . But it's all got over now, all set and stowed for permanence just as we want it, everything in its proper place. My workroom is furnished with the pedantry and elegant ease well known to you; the writing table stands at the big window with the splendid view of lake and Alps; quiet and tranquillity surround me. A pretty garden, already very well cultivated, offers me room for little walks and sittings-down, and to my wife the pleasantest of occupation and diversion from her crotchets about me. . . . Quite a nice soil for my retreat is won, you see, and when I reflect how much I have been longing after such a thing for long, and how hard it was even to get a prospect of it, I feel compelled to look on this good Wesendonck as one of my greatest benefactors. Next July, too, the Wesendoncks hope to be able to take possession themselves, and their neighbourship promises me all that is friendly and pleasant. — So, something achieved! — and I hope very soon to be able to resume my long-discontinued work."

This mood of content was but momentary, for on May 8 we find him writing to Liszt in a most despondent way. He has tried to dispose to music publishers of those scores of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" thus far completed, namely, "Das Rheingold" and "Die Walküre," and has failed; so he abandons the idea of completing "Siegfried," at which he was then at work. "I have determined to give up my headstrong design of completing the 'Nibelungen.' I have led my young Siegfried to a beautiful forest solitude, and there have left him under a linden tree, and taken leave of him with heartfelt tears. He will be better off there than elsewhere." Then Wagner recites the discouraging prospects of ever having "Der Ring" performed, its difficulties appearing insurmountable to his music publishers, and he resigns himself to the inevitable: "So I have decided to help myself. I have determined to finish at once 'Tristan and Isolde' on a moderate scale, which will make its performance easier, and to produce it next year at Strassburg with Niemann and Madame Meyer." The need for ready money — a

spectre that pursued Wagner quite to the end of his days—was the cause for this resolution. In the same letter he recurs again to the subject of "Tristan and Isolde," regarding it as a saviour in his money distress: "For so much I may assume that a thoroughly practicable work, such as 'Tristan' is to be, will quickly bring me a good income, and keep me afloat for a time. In addition to this, I have a curious idea. I am thinking of having a good Italian translation made of this work in order to produce it as an Italian opera at the theatre of Rio Janeiro, which will probably give my 'Tannhäuser' first. I mean to dedicate it to the Emperor of Brazil. . . ."

The explanation of this last sentence is to be found in the fact that Wagner had received at that time a commission to write an opera for the Emperor of Brazil. In the despair of his exile Wagner actually considered seriously the proposition of having the work translated into Italian and having it sung by the Italian singers of those days. Liszt comments on this: "By all the gods, how can you turn it into an opera for *Italian singers* . . . ? Well,

the incredible and impossible are your elements, and perhaps you will manage to do even this."

So it is plainly to be seen that before the love for Mathilde Wesendonck tugged at Wagner's heart his sole idea of composing a "Tristan and Isolde" was because he was driven hard into the corner of despair by his pecuniary difficulties. Nothing, however, came of the Brazilian project, nor did the writing of the "Tristan and Isolde" poem proceed at once, for we find a reference two months later, July 4, in a letter to Frau Ritter, one of his benefactors: "The poem [of 'Tristan'] is still slumbering in me: I shall shortly proceed to call it to life." This process — of calling "Tristan and Isolde" to life — was soon begun, and the first complete product is a prose draft which bears the date of August 20, 1857. Two days later, on August 22, the Wesendoncks moved into their new villa.

Less than a month afterward, on September 18, 1857, the poem of "Tristan and Isolde" was completed. Wagner presented it to Mathilde Wesendonck, and this act opened in

her heart the sluices that had confined the love she bore this man: "And this love, which has still remained unuttered by a word between us, was finally to cast aside its veil when I penned the poem of my 'Tristan' just a year ago, and gave it to her. Then for the first time did she lose her self-control, and confessed to me that she must die! — Reflect, dear sister, what this love must have meant to me, after a life of toil and sufferings, of sacrifices and commotions, such as mine! — Yet we recognised forthwith that any union between us could not be so much as thought of, and were accordingly resigned; renouncing every selfish wish, we suffered, endured, but — loved each other!"

So much Wagner confided to his sister Clara; and he has supplied us with another wonderfully frank reference to this episode in his Venice Diary. The page in question was written on September 18, 1858, a year after the poem had been completed:

"A year gone by to-day I finished the poem of Tristan and brought thee its last act, thou led'st me to the chair before the sofa, placedst

thy arm around me and saidst: 'I no more have a wish!'—On this day, at this hour was I born anew.—To then was my before-life: from then began my after-life: in that wondrous instant did I live. Thou know'st how I spent it? In no tumult of intoxication; but solemnly, profoundly penetrated by a soothing warmth, free as if looking on eternity.—I had been painfully, but more and more definitely detaching myself from the world; all had turned to negation in me, to warding off—the positive, affirmative, self-wedding-to-me. That instant gave it me, with so infallible a certitude that a hallowed standstill came o'er me. A gracious woman, shy and diffident, had taken heart to cast herself into a sea of griefs and sorrows, to shape for me that precious instant when she said: I love thee!—Thus didst thou vow thyself to death, to give me life; thus did I receive thy life, thenceforward from the world to part with thee, to suffer with thee, die with thee.—At once the spell of longing was dissolved!"

In the letters of the days in which this great passion actually burst its bonds, we have no

hint of all this. There is simply a brief note referring to an invitation extended to the "highly esteemed Familie Wesendonck" to come to the "Asyl," and Mr. Ellis believes this to have been the occasion when the "Tristan" poem was recited. This note is signed "R. W. Lazarus"—and we, who know what happened on that fateful eighteenth of September, fully appreciate that Wagner must really have believed himself resurrected, for he had found a home and the ardent love of a woman; and from the latter source had sprung the inspiration which made of "Tristan and Isolde" a music drama of experienced love and saved it from being merely a work prompted by money necessities.

How completely this inspiration possessed Wagner is proven by the rapidity with which the "Tristan" music began to take shape. The draft for the music of the first act was begun on the first day of October—less than two weeks after the completed poem had been presented to the Wesendonck—and these sketches were finished by New Year's eve. Then they were presented to Mathilde Wesen-

donck and were accompanied by this dedication, quite in the metre of part of the "Tristan" poem:

"Hochbeglückt,
Schmerzentrückt,
frei und rein
ewig Dein —
was sie sich klagten
und versagten,
Tristan und Isolde,
in keuscher Töne Golde,
ihr Weinen und ihr Küssen
leg' ich zu deinen Füssen,
dass sie den Engel loben,
der mich so hoch erhoben!"

Mr. Ellis, even, lacks the enthusiasm to reduce this questionable poetry to English rhyme, so we may accept his prose translation of it as follows: "Thrice happy, out of reach of pain, free and purely ever thine — Tristan and Isolde, what they bewailed and forewent, their tears and kisses, in music's chaste gold I lay at thy feet, that they may praise the angel who has lifted me so high!"

This dedication applies to the poem only. The completed music drama was not dedicated

to Mathilde Wesendonck, but to the Grand Duchess Luise of Baden. By that time—1859—Wagner had quit his Zurich "Asyl" and was no longer under the sheltering wing of the Wesendoncks. He did crave royal pardon for his political sins of 1848, however, as Germany was still forbidden territory to him; and the Grand Duke of Baden used his influence with the King of Saxony to have this granted—which it was not at that time.

We are told that these composition sketches were written in pencil by Wagner, but that they were carefully traced in ink, to preserve them, by the Wesendonck. It must be mentioned here that the music to three of the five poems, written by Mathilde Wesendonck and referred to in the preceding chapter, was composed about this time. The first one was "Der Engel," which dates from November 30; then comes "Träume," the two versions of which are dated December 4 and 5, and on December 17 "Schmerzen" is completed. Wagner scored "Träume" for small orchestra and had it performed as a serenade or aubade beneath the window of Mathilde Wesendonck

on the anniversary of her birthday, December 23, 1857.

It is fair to presume from these lover-like attentions that Wagner was, by this time, quite enamoured of his "Muse"—for by this name he refers to her and it is as "Wagner's Muse" that Mathilde Wesendonck is famously known. During this period of Wagner's stay in the "Asyl" he entertained various friends as guests. The list included Hans von Bülow and his bride, Cosima, she who in later years divorced Von Bülow and married Richard Wagner. In writing to Frau Ritter of the Von Bülows' visit, Wagner says, in part: "The rest of the day we always made music, when Frau Wesendonck would come loyally across, and thus we had our most grateful little audience close at hand." Here then were gathered under one roof the three women who figured so prominently in the life of Richard Wagner: Minna Wagner, Mathilde Wesendonck, and Cosima von Bülow, who later became Cosima Wagner. The roof they were gathered under was that of Richard Wagner, who was enjoying it through the hospitality of

Otto Wesendonck; and the latter had been persuaded to this generous act by the love which his wife, Mathilde Wesendonck, bore for Richard Wagner. The time of this meeting of the three feminine Wagner influences under the roof of that Zurich cottage was while Wagner was writing the poem of "Tristan and Isolde"! Artists who sentimentalise in the painting of scenes attending events in the lives of composers have missed a sensational opportunity by not pinning these famous figures to canvas for posterity to stare at and weave romance about!

There is very little of interest in the letters dating from the early months of the following year, 1858. The orchestral sketches for the first act of "Tristan and Isolde," begun November 5, 1857, were completed January 13, 1858. The music to the two remaining poems, written by Mathilde Wesendonck, also came to life: "Stehe still" on February 22, and "Im Treibhaus" on May 1. There was a brief visit to Paris lasting from January 16 to February 2, but the letters from these periods are not published. There is ample reason to

believe that they were ardent love confessions, for in the Venice Diary, written in the autumn of this year, Wagner refers to them: "Hast forgotten how we wrote each other when I was in Paris, and that joint lament burst simultaneously from our hearts, after we told each other our resolves as if inspired?"

It is a grave pity that the letters of this time are missing; they would have thrown interesting light, doubtless, upon the character of Wagner as a lover. The published notes of that period are uninteresting enough; also are they scant in number.

The orchestration of the first act of "Tristan" now occupied Wagner's time. It was finished early in April and was sent to the music publishers, Breitkopf and Härtel, immediately. A note announcing this, as well as a brief letter dated soon afterward, are addressed to "Madame Mathilde Wesendonck," and all terms of intimacy are omitted. What had happened?

Wagner's letter to his sister, Clara Wolfram, written after the emotional thunderbolt had descended upon the "Asyl," tells us what had

occurred: Minna had realised the love between her husband and Mathilde Wesendonck and had become jealous. "Yet she tolerated our companionship," Wagner continues, "which on its side never violated morals, but simply aimed at consciousness that we were in each other's presence. Consequently I assumed Minna to be sensible enough to comprehend that there was strictly nothing for her to fear, since an alliance was not to be dreamt of between us; and therefore that tolerance was her best and most advisable recourse. Well, I have had to learn that I probably deceived myself in that respect; chatter reached my ears, and finally she so far lost her senses as to intercept a letter from myself and—break it open." The spirit of this letter was that of resignation, Wagner tells us, and he believed it should have calmed Minna; but she noted principally that it contained endearing expressions and, in rage, demanded an explanation of Wagner. The outcome of this riotous scene was that Wagner and his wife decided to separate, but on the day following it was planned that the matter should rest in abeyance until

Minna's health had been restored, for which purpose she was to leave Zurich and take a cure. "As the day of departure for the place of cure drew near, she insisted upon speaking to the Wesendonck first: I firmly forbade her to. . . . She could not hold her peace, however; she went across, behind my back, and —doubtless without realising it herself— affronted the gentle soul most grossly. After she had told her, 'Were I an ordinary woman, I should take this letter to your husband!' there was nothing else for the Wesendonck— who was conscious of having never kept a secret from her husband . . . but to inform him at once of this scene and its cause."

We learn, too, that while Minna attended her cure and was absent from Zurich Wagner broke off all associations with the Wesendoncks. Even this failed to pacify the jealous wife, and when she returned, the storm broke out anew. By this time, it appears, the fury of the tempest had spread. According to Hans Bélart, the author of a brochure called "Richard Wagner in Zürich," this love affair had become the subject of common gossip in

the cafés of the town, and it reached the ears of Otto Wesendonck.

We have other evidence to prove that a crisis between the two houses had been reached: Wagner wrote to the Wesendonck some time in July of that year and in this letter he states that he had promised her husband a month before "to break off all personal commune with her." And the reasons for this are to be found in a later sentence in the same letter when Wagner writes: "For I merely felt that nothing save total severance or —a total union, could secure our love against the terrible collisions to which we had seen it exposed in these latter times." These collisions — whether between Wagner and Otto Wesendonck or between Wagner and Minna: we have no definite evidence to help us here— were brought about by the love of Wagner for the Wesendonck. The travail attending the birth of the child of this soul-union— "Tristan and Isolde"—must have been tremendous, for when sending the Wesendonck the sketches for the music of the second act of the work, in July of this year, Wagner wrote

to her: "What a wondrous birth of our child of sorrows! Had we to love, then, after all? From whom could it be asked, that he should forsake his children?—

God stand by us, poor creatures!
Or are we too rich?
Must we help ourselves unaided?—"

Wagner began the scoring of the second act of this musical love-child on July 5. About the same time he writes to the beloved woman that he has made up his mind to "raze our last hearth and home"; and the circumstances which drove him to this resolve are stated in a confession to his sister: "The two women so close together, was impossible any longer; for neither could the Wesendonck forget, that, in reward for her supreme self-sacrifice and tenderest regards for me, she had been met on my side, through my wife, with such coarse and insulting treatment; moreover people had begun to speak about it. Enough: the most unheard-of scenes and tortures never ceased for me, and out of consideration as well for the one as the other, I finally had to make up my mind to vacate the fair asylum that had

been prepared for me with such tender affection."

But this resolve, on the part of Wagner, to renounce his "Asyl" was still contemplated, at that time, as an act of the future; also did he mean to return to his haven from time to time. "I shall not often visit you, for in future you must only see me when I'm sure of shewing you a calm and cheerful countenance," he writes to Mathilde Wesendonck; and he adds: "Probably, nay certainly, the time is at hand — I conjecture the beginning of next winter — when I shall depart from Zurich altogether for a spell. . . . Then I often shall not see you for long. But then to return again to the Refuge so endeared to me, to recover from worry and unavoidable vexation, to breathe pure air, and gain new zest for the old work for which Nature has chosen me, — this, if you grant it me, will ever be the point of mellow light that buoys me up there, the sweet relief that becks me here."

This was penned some time in July, 1858. A month afterward, on August 17, Wagner

fled precipitately from Zurich. Bélart comes to the conclusion that something occurred on August 16 which brought about the crisis—something which aroused Otto Wesendonck, who had grown suspicious. According to this source of information there was an exchange of angry words between Wagner and Otto Wesendonck, culminating in a few words of command, issued by the latter. Wagner's doom was sealed. He left the "Asyl" at five o'clock on the morning of August 17, after a wretched and sleepless night.

Time mellows most memories—and Wagner grew famous with years! So it is easy to understand that even Mathilde Wesendonck in some pages of reminiscences, published in 1896, declared: "With sorrow and pain Wagner left his new home in Zurich, left it of his own accord. Why? Idle question! We have received his work 'Tristan and Isolde,' which dates from these days—for the rest we must remain silent, and bow ourselves in reverence."

But some of the records attending this flight seem to contradict the above statement that

Wagner forsook his "Asyl" of his own free will. We have seen clearly that he had planned, only a few weeks earlier, to remain in Zurich until winter and to visit the "Asyl" at times. He had even invited Liszt to visit him there, and Liszt had replied that he would alter his plans so as to arrive at Zurich on August 20, at the same time asking Wagner: "Write me by return whether I shall find you in Zurich on the 20th inst. I should, of course, not make this journey unless I could be certain of being a few days with you." It appears that Liszt was much mystified at Wagner's sudden departure, for he writes from Weimar on August 26: "When you can spare a quiet hour, let me know why you did not care to stay a few days longer at Zurich. . . ." This would be enough to prove that Wagner's departure from the "Asyl" was far from being premeditated at that time, but we also have some other indications that it was a precipitate departure. In a letter to his friend Jacob Sulzer, at one time chief magistrate of Zurich, Wagner speaks of his "seemingly so sudden departure"; and his Diary is explicitly headed:

"Diary — Since my flight from the Asyl 17. August 1858." The word "flight" is all-expressive; in the German he uses "*Flucht*" — and this too cannot be misunderstood. Now if Wagner had left the "Asyl" "of his own accord" it is hardly possible that he would have referred to his departure as a "flight from the Asyl."

Bélart tells us Wagner was compelled to leave Zurich so suddenly that he had not time to supply himself with the necessary travelling money. He rode from Zurich to Geneva — where, according to this author, he tried to borrow money — and then continued his trip to Venice.

Wagner never again returned to his beloved "Asyl" to live. During those last few hours at Zurich he wrote two notes to Mathilde Wesendonck. The first is a single sentence and, curiously enough, it is written in English: "It must be so!" The second is the last letter of this period, and it is dated August 17, 1858, the date of his departure. So it must have been penned in the early dawn of that unhappy morning, for Wagner left at five o'clock:

"Farewell! Farewell, dear love!

"I'm leaving tranquilly. Where'er I be, I shall be wholly thine now. Try to keep the Asyl for me auf Wiedersehen! Auf Wiedersehen! Dear soul of my soul, farewell—auf Wiedersehen!"

In his Diary Wagner recalls that last night in the "Asyl." He went to bed at eleven, but was awakened at about one in the morning by the sensation of a kiss on his brow—succeeded by the sound of a shrill sigh. "'Twas all so lifelike, that up I sprang and peered around me. . . . Had a spirit stood guard by me in that dread hour?" He could sleep no more, and when dawn came he gazed for a long time "across once more" at the Wesendonck villa. Then he went down stairs, where his wife was awaiting him. She offered him a cup of tea, and then they paced the garden for a while, she indulging in a final reproach. "So I set forth. And lo!—I won't deny it: it was well with me, I breathed free.—I was faring into solitude: there I am at home; in that solitude where I may love thee with every breath I draw!—"

Never again did Richard Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck meet on the same romantic footing as when they parted in Zurich. He had, before his flight, seen her and had taken leave of her. So much is certain, but what transpired we do not know, as we have only a flimsy reference to the event. So Tristan parted from Isolde, and the actual romance had come to an end. It was to live hereafter only in letters and in diary entries; but the meeting had borne greater fruit: the first act of "Tristan and Isolde" was complete in its orchestral version, and the second one had been entirely sketched and the scoring begun. The experience had furrowed the soul of Wagner the artist—through the heart it had touched his brain; and the impression was deep enough to supply him with the stimulus to finish the wonderful work even away from the presence of this marvellous woman who had at first inspired him. Mathilde Wesendonck had served her artistic purpose; and the world is the richer for her love for Wagner. Now that the inspiration had been grafted in Wagner's brain, it needed only rest and peace in

order that the issue might be brought forth. It was in search of this peace that Wagner set forth, after his flight from Zurich. He found it, and as he did, "Tristan and Isolde" was completed. None of the human intensity of the love between Mathilde Wesendonck and Richard Wagner is absent from it. Seven years after this parting, on June 10, 1865, this "Child of Sorrows"—"Tristan and Isolde" —was performed for the first time. And Mathilde Wesendonck did not go to Munich to hear the wonderful work which she had inspired.

CHAPTER III

THE HIGH SONG OF LOVE CONCLUDED

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HERE WILL THE TRISTAN be completed—a defiance to all the raging of the world. And with that, an I may, shall I return to see thee, comfort thee, to make thee happy: there looms my fairest, my most sacred wish. So be it! Sir Tristan, Lady Isolde! help me, help my angel! Here shall your wounds cease bleeding, here shall they heal and close. From here shall the world once learn the sublime and noble stress of highest love, the plaints of agonising joy. And august as a god, serene and hale, shalt

thou then behold me back, thy lowly friend!"

This is a leaf from the Diary, pages begun immediately after that tragic flight from the "Asyl." It is dated Venice, the city to which Wagner had turned in his distress, the city in which he died about a quarter of a century later, when fame had come to him as it has come to few composers during lifetime. Now he was settled in roomy apartments in a palace on the Grand Canal, finding in his solitude — Minna, his wife, had gone to Dresden — the mood for work and feeding his love upon recollections and hopes. Sentences about his personal comfort rub against those vowing undying affection for his one beloved, Mathilde Wesendonck.

He had stormed from Zurich August 17, and not until September 7 did he receive a word from her. It was in the form of a message from their common Zurich friend, a Frau Wille — and contradicts still further the statement, which Wagner's sentimental vindicators so obstinately harp upon, that he left the "Asyl" of his own free will. Wagner's entry

on this date is a bitter one, full of reproach. Frau Wille had written him that the Wesendonck had decided to renounce him. And the reasons given for this renunciation were: "parents, children—duties." This stirs the very dregs of conceit in Wagner, and he catalogues the circumstances which surround her: "I see thee in thy gorgeous house, see all *that*, hear all *those* to whom we must ever remain unintelligible . . . and anger takes me at the thought: to *these*, who know nought of thee, comprehend nought of thee, but want everything from thee, thou'rt to sacrifice all! —I cannot, will not see or hear it, if I'm to finish worthily my earthly work!"

From this startling confession we can but gather that, at leavetaking, Wagner had broached the subject of having her follow him into the solitude of uncertainty. The circumstance suggests another close link with the "Tristan and Isolde" drama where, at the appealing scene near the close of the second act, when King Marke bemoans Tristan's treachery, the latter turns to Isolde and asks:

"Wohin nun Tristan scheidet, willst du, Isold' ihm folgen?"

But in the drama Isolde acquiesces with:

"Wo Tristan's Haus und Heim, da kehr' Isolde ein"

while in the bleak reality Mathilde Wensendonck recalls—duties! It must have been a sad blow to the sentimental Wagner!

A few days later the wound is deepened when the Wesendonck returns to Wagner an unopened note; but again balm is spread by a note from her, of only three words—the text of which message may be readily guessed. During the remainder of these fascinating pages the mood of resignation alternates with that of impulse and impatience. In one of the latter outbursts is recorded a temptation to commit suicide. This entry is dated November 1:

"To-day is All Souls' day!—

I woke out of brief, but deep sleep, after long and fearful sufferings such as I never had suffered before. I stood upon the balcony, and peered into the Canal flowing black below; a tempest was raging, my leap, my fall would have been noticed by no one. I

were free of torments, once I sprang, and I clenched my fist to mount the hand-rail. — Could I — with my sight on thee, — upon thy children? —

Now All Souls' day has broken! —
All Souls! peace be with you! —

Now I know it is still granted me to die within thine arms! . . . "

Almost as soon as his piano arrives the work on "Tristan and Isolde" is taken up again. On October 12 he writes: "I shall now return to 'Tristan' to let the deep art of sounding silence there speak for me to thee"; and on December 8 there is entered in the Diary: "Since yesterday I have been occupied with the 'Tristan' again. I'm in the second act still, but — what music it's becoming! I could work my whole life long at this music alone. O, it grows deep and fair, and the sublimest marvels fit so supply to the sense; I have never made a thing like this! But I am also melting away in this music; I'll hear of no more, when it's finished. In it I will live for aye, and with me — "

The direct correspondence with Mathilde

Wesendonck is resumed again in December, 1858. The tone of these letters is intimate, but expressions of endearment are absent. He sends her for this birthday anniversary, December 23, a printed copy of the poem of "Tristan and Isolde," and she wrote upon it Isolde's lament:

"Mir erkoren —
Mir verloren —
Heil und hehr
kühn und feig —
Todgeweites Haupt!
Todgeweites Herz!"

An especially intimate entry is recorded in this Venice Diary under date of December 22, the day before her birthday anniversary:

"A lovely morning, dear child!

"For three days had I been plodding at the passage 'Wen du umfangen, wem du gelacht' and 'In deinen Armen, dir geweiht,' etc. — I had been long interrupted, and could not find the corner in my memory for its working out; it made me seriously uneasy. I could get no farther; when Koboldchen tapped, it showed its face to me as gracious Muse, and in an

instant the passage was clear; I sat down to the piano, and wrote it off as rapidly as if I had known it by heart for ever so long. A severe critic will find a touch of reminiscence in it: the 'Träume' flit close by; but thou 'lt forgive me that—my sweetheart!—Nay, ne'er repent thy love of me: 't is heavenly!—"

This entry is interesting in that it is an evidence of the dependence that Wagner still placed—sentimentally, if you like—upon the influence or memories of the Wesendonck. The reference to "Koboldchen" had been used before in this correspondence; it must have meant the awakening of Wagner's powers to compose; and the "Muse" is, of course, Mathilde Wesendonck. "Träume" is one of the songs the text of which was written by Mathilde Wesendonck. The musical passage referred to is near the close of the great love duet in the second act and is an episode of appealing beauty.

On March 9, 1859, the second act of "Tristan and Isolde" is completed, and news of this deed is sent to her. The letter was evidently sent with one written to Myrrha, the daughter,

for it is headed: "To Mamma." Its first sentence embraces the important announcement: "Yesterday I got finished with my second act at last, the big (musical) problem so dubious to all, and know it solved in a manner like nothing before; it is the acme of my art till now."

Then the spirit of unrest must have possessed Wagner again, for he returns to Switzerland and writes to her again from Lucerne. There he began the final act, on April 9, and it is rushed through with impetuous haste, for it is concluded by July 16. This speed is accounted for in a letter, written when commencing this act's music: "It [the third act] shows me distinctly that I shall invent no new thing any more: that one supreme blossom-tide awoke within me such multitude of buds, that I now have merely to stretch back my hand, to rear the flower with easy tilth. — It also is to me as if this seemingly most sorrow-burdened act will not sorely harass me as one might think."

And as the music of this act grows under his hand he writes: "Child! This Tristan is becoming something *terrible*." The correspond-

ence of these days takes an easier stride, more companion than lover like; he addresses her generally as "Child," and he chatters good-humoredly and freely with her. When the act in work is half completed we find this amusing letter from him:

"Child! Child, dearest child,

"Here comes a terrible tale! The master has made something good once again!

"I have just been playing through the finished worked-out first half of my act, and had to tell myself what dear God once told himself when he found that All was good! I have nobody to praise me, any more than dear God had then—circa 6000 years back—and so, among other things, I told myself: Richard, you're a d—l of a fellow!"

When the pathetic incidents of the work find music to give them utterance he admits to the "Child" that he is weeping over the tragedy of it all. With Otto Wesendonck he seems to have made peace—Wagner wrote him a letter of sympathy at the death of the child Guido Wesendonck in 1858—and he tries now to lure the couple to Lucerne to

visit him. When the last act is about completed he writes: "Worse than in my work now, it can never have gone at Solferino; now that those folks are putting a stop to bloodshed, I'm pushing it on. I'm making a terrible clearance; to-day I've struck Melot and Kurwenal dead, too. If you wish for a sight of the battlefield, you'd best come before everyone's buried."

He also lapses into a bantering mood with her about this time, and in a very naïve letter tells her that his room at the Hotel Schweizerhof has been changed and that he is now living in one where he is barred from the sun by closed shutters and where he can imagine himself in gaol: "I take it in good part, however, as my fellow prisoners, Tristan and Isolde, are soon to feel quite free; and so I now renounce *together* with them, *together* with them to get free. Mostly every other day I am at least happy in my work. . . . This time I don't feel that old dread lest I should die before the last note: on the contrary, I'm so certain of finishing, that the day before yesterday I even made a fólk-song of it on my ride:

"Im Schweizerhof zu Luzern,
von Heim und Haus weit und fern —
da starben Tristan und Isolde,
so traurig er, und sie so holde:
sie starben frei, sie starben gern,
im Schweizerhof zu Luzern —
gehalten von Herrn
Oberst Seegessern. —"

The sketches for the last act of "Tristan and Isolde" were completed on July 16, and a letter dated twelve days later expresses the eagerness with which Wagner is working to complete the full orchestral score of this act, announcing on August 4 that the work will be completed in three days. It must have been finished about August 6, for the Wesendoncks came to Lucerne then to celebrate the event. A few days afterward Wagner visited the Wesendoncks at their villa at Zurich. Immediately following this visit Otto Wesendonck offers to lend Wagner a sum of money for which he had need, his music publishers still refusing to purchase the finished scores of "Das Rheingold" and "Die Walküre." Wagner declines to accept this present from Otto Wesendonck, but he proposes a business

arrangement: that Wesendonck buy the scores for 6000 francs each, for which he deeds to him all royalties accruing from the sale of these works. This offer appears to have been accepted, and Otto Wesendonck became the owner of those scores of the epoch-making work "Der Ring des Nibelungen" that were completed at that time—namely, "Das Rheingold" and "Die Walküre." From all this it is made clear that Otto Wesendonck—the King Marke of this love affair—had forgiven Wagner.

The footing is now so frank and friendly that it appears to Wagner to be nothing less than ideal. He leaves Lucerne, and in the autumn of 1859 we find him at Paris. This trip resulted so disastrously later in the famous "Tannhäuser" fiasco, and during a part of which troublous time Otto Wesendonck spent at Paris in Wagner's company. On November 29 he writes to her, in the flush of happiness at the newly made peace: "Children, that we are *three* is really something wonderfully grand! It is incomparable, my and your greatest triumph! We stand inconceivably high above mankind, inconceivably high!"

For her birthday anniversary that year, 1859, he sent her a charming letter, frank but not outwardly endearing in its terms, and a pianoforte version of a close which he had written to the Prelude of "Tristan and Isolde." It appears that Hans von Bülow had begged him a year earlier to write an ending to this Prelude so that he could use it for concert performance. Wagner refers to this in the present birthday letter to the Wesendonck: "At that time no inspiration could have come to me: it seemed so impossible that I flatly declined. Since then, however, I have written the third act and found the full close for the whole: so, while drawing up the programme for a Paris concert . . . it occurred to me to outline that close in advance, as a glimmering presage of redemption. Well, it has succeeded quite admirably, and to-day I send you this mysteriously tranquillising close as the best gift I can make for your birthday. . . . Ivy and vine you will recognise in the music, though especially when you hear it in the orchestra, where strings and wind alternate with each other; it will come out quite beautifully. I

expect to hear it in the middle of January, when I'll hear it for both of us."

The music of this close is a foreshadowing of the "Liebestod" music, the finale of the work; and the reference to "ivy and vine" must be taken to hark back to the romantic ending that has been affixed to the old legend. This runs that King Marke was so remorseful at the death of Tristan and Isolde that he caused both bodies to be buried in one grave — or on opposite sides of the same chapel: there is the slight difference in the tale. And over the corpse of Tristan he had planted a grapevine, while over that of Isolde a rush bush was placed. These grew and intertwined so closely that no one could tear them apart.

The above letter also contains a programme explanation of the Prelude, which elucidation will be referred to in a later chapter, when the music is discussed.

The Von Bülows, Cosima and Hans, visit Wagner during this period, and here, too, his wife Minna joins him again. She remains with him in Paris until the middle of 1861, when Wagner and his wife separate once

more. The interim between her coming and leaving was a turbulent one, with the disappointments attending his artistic hopes, the failure of his "Tannhäuser," and the usual financial difficulties. It would appear that Minna jealously seemed to attribute some share of the "Tannhäuser" fiasco at the Paris Grand Opéra to her discovery that "the pair *remain* in love"; and a dejected letter from Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck tells of this attempt at reconciliation: "My household goods have been packed again . . . in all probability I shall never see them more. I am wanting my wife to settle down in Dresden, and take them to herself there; for my part I can think no more of settling down. This the upshot of a last, infinitely miserable experience! 'T is not appointed me to cultivate my muse in the lap of a cosy home; each attempt to defy all the frowns of my fate, and indulge a longing so innate in me, is more emphatically frustrated every time, from within and from without; the daemon of my life throws every cunning semblance to the dust. . . . "

Some of the letters to her at this time are what he calls "Kapellmeister's letters"; that is, full of records of his artistic activities and dreams; the others are very discouraging in their tone, and out of both does the spirit of happiness seem to have fled. He travels about with a hope of finding acceptance at some opera house for his "Tristan and Isolde"; he goes to Weimar and Vienna, after Paris had proven unyielding ground for such hopes. He is still a political exile in Saxony, amnesty having been granted in 1860 to the "rebels of 1848" in other parts of Germany. Finally the Vienna Court Opera accepts "Tristan and Isolde" for performance, but rehearsals are long drawn-out; and with no immediate hope for performance Wagner leaves Vienna and returns to Paris for a while, then takes up his quarters at Biebrich, on the Rhine, where he seeks oblivion in work and is busy with "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg." Here his wife Minna joins him once more, only to leave him again in ten days, her temper tried by the friendly intercourse that still existed between Wagner and the Wesendonck. "There's no

more doubt of it; it is impossible for me to live with my wife any more," he writes. Nevertheless he admits to another friend, on April 5, 1862, that his wife had obtained the full Dresden amnesty for him. But this political freedom now avails him little; he goes to Vienna to assist in the preparation of "Tristan and Isolde"—which was eventually abandoned as "impossible" after fifty-four rehearsals—and settles at Penzing in the suburb of Vienna. From this place, June 5, 1863, we have a remarkable outburst of emotion again, directed not to Mathilde Wesendonck, but to their mutual friend Frau Wille. He admits to this confidant that he cannot address Mathilde Wesendonck formally, nor can he write to her from his heart "without treason to her husband": "What, then, is to be done? for I cannot keep it wholly buried in my heart; *some* human soul at least must learn how it stands with me. So I tell it to you. She is and stays my first and only love; I feel it plainer every day. That was the summit of my life; the trembling years of beautiful distress I lived beneath the waxing spell of her

proximity hold all the sweetness of my life. It needs but the remotest ground, and I am back amidst them, all saturated with that magic atmosphere which takes my breath still, just as then, and leaves me nothing but a sigh. And were there no stimulant else, yet dreams would do it. . . ."

Wagner was now conducting concerts, making propaganda for his own compositions and eking out of this trying occupation the ever-necessary money. During the course of his travels he comes to Carlsruhe, and then goes to Zurich, where he spends a few days with the Wesendoncks. A few letters follow his departure from the Wesendonck villa on the "Green Hill," the last one being a curt note of birthday greeting to her.

Then a year's silence! The cause for this break is assumed to be Otto Wesendonck's refusal to help Wagner in his financial distress, which had grown so great that during the spring of 1864 Wagner flees Vienna to escape his creditors. As a final call for aid he writes to Frau Wille, in March, 1864, to ask whether the Wesendoncks can accommo-

date him with "a workroom either in the principal building, or in the little neighbouring house I occupied before"—by the latter he means the "Asyl." He asks this hospitality so that he might complete "Die Meistersinger," but the request is refused. Wagner is crushed and angered by it, for he writes to his friend and disciple, Peter Cornelius: "What depresses me so and robs me of interest in life is the experience I am going through with some people whose actions prove how little in earnest they are with their expressions of sympathy. . . ." Fleeing from Vienna he took refuge at the house of his friends, the Willes, at Mariafeld.

After a period of hopeless distress there occurs the almost sensational rescue in May, 1864, by King Ludwig of Bavaria, who becomes Wagner's royal patron. Following this, Wagner takes up residence in Munich and from there he writes to ask, January, 1865, for a portfolio of his sketches, etc., in possession of the Wesendonck. He addresses her as "Best Child," and pledges himself that the portfolio shall be returned to her after he has

copied out of it whatever necessary: "He [the King] wants everything collected, to take it in his charge and know that he possesses me entire.

"Ay, child, *he* loves me; there's no gainsaying it!"

Then, as a result of this royal patronage, there comes the possibility for the first performance of "Tristan and Isolde," in Munich, June 10, 1865. So in the spring of that year — when it was still hoped that the first performance of this work would occur earlier — Wagner writes to her:

"FREUNDIN,

The Tristan will be wonderful.

Will you come? ?

Your

1st performance 15th May. R. W."

"Tristan and Isolde" was produced on June 10, 1865, but neither Mathilde nor Otto Wesendonck was present. On July 31 of that year Wagner makes peace once more with Otto Wesendonck — he apologises — but with a purpose, for in the same breath he asks an enormous favour. His apology is

framed thus: "The disturbance that drove me from you six years back should have been avoided: it so estranged my life from me, that you yourself, as I, did not really know me again when I last approached you once more. This pain should also have been spared me: to myself it seemed as if it might have been possible, and beautiful, very beautiful would it have been, ay, sublime, if it had been spared me,—but one must not ask for the sublime,—and I was wrong." And the favour he asks is that Otto Wesendonck send the manuscript score of "Das Rheingold" to King Ludwig! This Herr Wesendonck generously does, and sends the manuscript score of "Die Walküre" too, receiving in reply a letter of thanks from the King.

Now the correspondence between Wagner and Mathilde Wesendonck grows sparse, only a single letter being preserved after this period, although there are letters as late as 1870 in the collection of missives to Otto Wesendonck. In January, 1865, Cosima von Bulow wrote to Frau Wesendonck asking for some of Wagner's literary works in her

possession — and the Wesendonck seems to have answered this letter not to Cosima von Bülow but to Richard Wagner! — a gentle reproach. She gives him a list of the contents of the portfolio and asks him to select what he wishes, which will then be sent at his — Wagner's — personal request. Another subtle reproach!

But why continue? The great love had, on Wagner's side, spent itself. In 1866 Minna Wagner died, and in 1870 he married Cosima, divorced wife of Von Bülow. "The first and only love" seems to have paled in comparatively few years from the date of Wagner's last reference to his passion for the Wesendonck. When Wagner married Cosima von Bülow the first visit of the couple was to Mariafeld, near Zurich, and to the "Green Hill"; and when the son of this union, Siegfried Wagner, was at Berlin Mme. Wesendonck was eager in her hospitality toward him. Mathilde and Otto Wesendonck were to the end ardent enthusiasts about Wagner's music and attended the Bayreuth Festivals.

And so this all-consuming passion had

burned out its impetuous fire and had resolved itself into an accepted condition of conventional friendship. It was Wagner's wish that his letters to the Wesendonck should be destroyed, but she wisely decided otherwise, and even undertook the task of preparing these documents for publication, which task was interrupted by her death.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Mathilde Wesendonck for having given the world these documents. They form a beautiful record of a big love; and, more than that, they call to our mind a vivid appreciation of that white flame of passion in which "Tristan and Isolde" was conceived.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGEND

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"TRISTAN AND ISOLDE" is, in all likelihood, the world's greatest love story. How old the tale is no one may say with certainty — it dates from probably the ninth and possibly the sixth century; only so much is fixed beyond doubt that some time in the twelfth century the story took the form in which it has come down to us, and which with few changes it maintains.

Wagner has modernised it in that he has effectively shorn the plot of its diverting excursions; he has trained the dramatic stream of

the narrative to flow in a straight and intense course; and he has brought the tale vividly into the time of the present without in the least attempting to shift the period in which the action takes place. This period still remains fixed in the indefinite past, and the characters and customs are of that time; but so human is the motive — that of love, the cosmic mainspring — that this pair of lovers appear before our eyes as of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. Their plaint is that of all ages, and their sorrow is that of the universe. There are other pairs of famous lovers: Paolo and Francesca, Launcelot and Guinevere, make sad appeal; and Romeo and Juliet will eternally be the most lamented of youthful lovers; but about Tristan and Isolde there frames itself a sense and an appreciation of the heroic, tinged by the desperate hopelessness of the lovers' passions. "Sympathy" and "human interest" are much abused qualities these days, but the story of Tristan and Isolde contains these attributes raised to their highest powers.

In addition to keeping the story of Tristan and Isolde astir in public mind, Wagner

deserves credit for having ennobled the tale. He makes Tristan a hero of the finest type, one whose sense of honour is undermined only by the irresistible powers of the love potion and by the relentless passion of Isolde. He is loyal to King Marke up to the moment of tasting of the philtre, and he sacrifices himself in expiation of his sin. I have not the slightest intention of joining the silly chorus of those who endeavour to make out Wagner as a moralist rather than an artist, and thus prove the innocence of each of his heroic characters. I believe that Tristan was a sinner, but Wagner has limned him as a character whose human motives and woes appeal to our sympathies. Dante, in his "Inferno," Canto V, places Tristan in the second circle, in the list of Carnal Sinners, together with Helena, Achilles, and Paris:

> "See Paris, Tristan; . . .
> whom love had parted from our life."

One has but to read the Gottfried von Strassburg version to note that in this, from which Wagner drew his material, Tristan is far from being a noble character. He stoops to most

ignoble devices to cover his guilt, and he never remains in an awkwardly tight place if conscienceless limberness of his tongue can save him from it. He goes through life constantly parading his courtly virtues; when the discovery of his guilt drives him from the court of King Marke he flees to another land, and there marries a woman whom he does not love. Finally, when suffering and longing are upon him, his wife lies to him about the coming of his beloved Isolt; so he laments, turns his face to the wall, and dies more like a coward than a hero.

Yet it was very easy for Wagner to mould his finer Tristan out of the romance of chivalry bequeathed him by Gottfried von Strassburg, and it is no wonder that this old poem interested Wagner as the material for a drama. It is full of incidents that are food for a dramatist —as even an outline of its scheme of happenings will prove — and the throbbing passion of the lovers must, at the time when plans of the work held his attention, have appealed sympathetically to Wagner. Here follows a brief and direct summary of Gottfried von

Strassburg's "Tristan and Isolde" poem. In the necessary shortening process all incidents that have direct bearing on the thread of the plot have been retained, while some irrelevant matter, from the present point of view, has been omitted:

A royal and valiant knight, Riwalin, once ruled over Parmenie. This land was his own by birthright, but his rule also swayed the fortunes of another country which he held and governed for Morgan, a Briton duke. Riwalin was a youth of comely body, of courtly and gentle manners, and of undaunted valour. But he was prey to his own impetuousness, and so he, without provocation, made war on Morgan. Riwalin came out of battle a victor, and as Morgan prayed for peace, this was granted and both men pledged themselves to keep it for a year.

With the assurance of peace Riwalin became seized with unrest. He ordered a ship to be laden with equipment necessary for a year's stay in foreign lands, and in addition to the items of necessity, he added regal trappings and luxuries befitting his station and taste.

The first objective point of Riwalin's expedition was Cornwall, ruled by King Marke. The court of this king, assembled at Tintagel Castle, was famous for its exalted tone of chivalry, and Riwalin desired to become versed in its eminently knightly manners. Selecting ten men from among his retainers, Riwalin set sail for Cornwall, leaving his own lands in the care of his faithful marshal, Rual le Foitenant.

Arriving at Tintagel, the courtesy and hospitality of the court were extended to Riwalin and his suite. The time of May and its tournaments approached, and for these King Marke commanded the presence of England's knights. During the ensuing jousts Riwalin, already a favourite at Tintagel, displayed his surpassing skill at feats of sword and spear.

It was then that Riwalin fell in love with Blansche-flur, King Marke's sister; and she returned his affection. The secret of their love was well guarded, even when Riwalin left the castle to aid King Marke in fighting a foe who had chosen to menace Cornwall during the time of tournament. The foe was repulsed, but Riwalin, wounded in his side by

a spear, was brought back to Tintagel dying. The entire court bewailed the impending fate of this beloved man, while Blansche-flur wept her heart out in sorrow. Desperate, she appealed to her governess to make it possible that she should at least see Riwalin before death came to claim him; and the governess, convinced that nothing could save the wounded knight, led Blansche-flur to her beloved disguised as a beggaress. Riwalin, warned of her visit, had sent his attendants from him. The youthful, pretty Blansche-flur fainted at the sight of this wasted knight; then she regained consciousness

> "And kissed him hundred thousand times
> In one brief hour."

This gave him the strength and courage to live—and to love. And Riwalin became convalescent.

Soon news came to the recovered knight that Morgan had collected an army to battle against Riwalin's forces, so the latter called together his retinue and then went to take his farewell of Blansche-flur. She fell uncon-

scious at the news of his leaving, and when she came to her senses told him that she was with child. She knew that if she remained in Cornwall unwed King Marke would send her from court and would dishonour the child. Riwalin immediately offered either to remain with her in Cornwall or to take her with him to Parmenie, his own land. She chose the latter, and secretly went on board his ship. Riwalin then took regretful leave of King Marke, hastened to his ship, where he found Blansche-flur awaiting him. Sail was hoisted without delay and the ship was headed for Parmenie.

Arriving there Riwalin conferred with his marshal Rual, and after the matters of war had been discussed he told the marshal of his love for Blansche-flur and of her presence. Rual advised that Riwalin take her at once in matrimony and announce forth the tidings of his marriage to the people. This was done, and Rual took Blansche-flur to Kanoel, where she found safe shelter with the marshal's wife. Then Riwalin led his men to battle against the foe, and was slain.

Blansche-flur received the news of her husband's death unmoved. Neither a sigh nor a tear escaped her; then she lay in agony for four days. And as her soul went from its body she gave life to a son.

Rual and his wife cared for the infant, but kept its birth a secret, giving speed to the report that a child had come silently to Blansche-flur in her last hour. So there was mourning in the land for Riwalin, for Blansche-flur, and for the infant that had come of them. Rual feared that if it became known that Riwalin's child was alive it might be made the butt of Morgan's hatred against its sire; so he schemed with his wife that she pretend the tortures of travail, which she did; and after a while it was announced that she had given birth to a son. This child was none other than the infant of Riwalin and Blansche-flur, but it was known as the son of Rual le Foitenant. And because of the sorrow that had surrounded its coming, the marshal and his wife decided that it be baptised Tristan —

"For Triste, thus is sorrow named."

The trusty Rual left nothing undone to prepare the lad in every possible skill and accomplishment. When Tristan was seven he was sent into foreign lands in the charge of a teacher, and there he became conversant with many tongues and many customs. He was taught to be proficient in music and skilful in duel and battle. And he fenced as cleverly with words as he did with swords.

At fourteen years of age Tristan returned to his foster father, and it happened about this time that into this port there came a ship of Norwegian merchantmen who displayed their wares. Tristan and his friend Kurwenal paid a visit to the ship, and here Tristan's versatility—and especially his proficiency at chess—convinced the Norwegians that he was a prize worth abducting. When the game of chess was at an end, Tristan noticed that the vessel had been put to sea. He pleaded to be returned to his native land and Kurwenal joined in his plea. For answer Kurwenal was set adrift in a little boat, while the ship continued on its course, carrying Tristan with it. Fearful storms arose, and the sailors becoming

superstitious, ascribed to Tristan the wrath that was being poured upon them by heaven. So they made for land, and putting Tristan ashore, left him. Our hero met two pilgrims and learned from them that he was in Cornwall, whereupon he glibly persuaded them that he was one of King Marke's hunting party, from which he had strayed while pursuing quarry. The pilgrims led him toward Tintagel, and on the way they encountered the king's hunters, whose admiration Tristan immediately won by his cleverness in quartering a deer. He joined the troop of hunters, rode with them into the courtyard of Tintagel, and at once impressed King Marke and the courtiers so deeply with his exceeding quick wit and skilful hand that he was heartily welcomed. Tristan displayed one talent after another, proving an adept at foreign languages, music, and feats of sword. He surpassed all others at these and other traits and in short order became the favourite of the court.

Meanwhile Rual, having lost all trace of Tristan, set forth to find him. For four years he strayed through various lands and sacri-

ficed his fortune in search of the lad. Finally, he met with the two pilgrims who had conducted Tristan to Tintagel, and from these he learned the news he craved. He set forth at once for Tintagel, and arriving there, was affectionately greeted by Tristan, who still believed Rual to be his father. King Marke made him welcome, and soon afterward Rual told the assembled court the story of Tristan's parentage, the love story of Riwalin and Blansche-flur.

Thus King Marke learned that Tristan was his nephew. As soon as possible the youth was knighted and he became the king's most trusted henchman. Tristan's first deed of independent valour was to revenge the death of his father Riwalin by making war on Morgan, meeting him in personal conflict and cleaving his skull open. Then he returned to Cornwall and there learned that Gurmun, King of Ireland, had sent his warrior Morold to King Marke, demanding from him tribute, his king having at one time conquered Cornwall. Morold offered the alternative of personal encounter, but so doughty a fighter was he that

none had dared face him in single-handed encounter. Tristan laughed the fears of the other knights to scorn and invited Morold to battle upon an island. The two knights rode to the island in separate boats, but after Tristan landed he sent his boat adrift downstream, remarking to Morold, that as only one of the two knights would survive the encounter, one boat would be sufficient to convey the victorious one back to mainland. The battle was a most fierce one. Morold cleaved Tristan's thigh open to the bone and frankly told him that the wound was deadly, for his sword was poisoned and none but Isolt, Queen of Ireland, could cause the wound to close. Instead of relinquishing his courage, Tristan charged Morold savagely and smote off his right hand just as the Irish knight was about to remount his horse. Then he aimed a mighty blow at Morold's head, having first knocked off his helmet, and so deep did his sword enter into Morold's skull that when he drew it out a sliver of steel from the edge of the blade remained in Morold's brainpan. The followers of Morold took back to Ireland the dead knight,

whereupon the King of Ireland swore death to anyone from Cornwall who might land in Ireland.

Although victorious over Morold, Tristan was now made a thrall by the wound in his thigh. No herbs brought him comfort, and the wisdom of physicians was unavailing. Tristan called King Marke to counsel and then decided to sail for Ireland, planning by ruse to find relief for his ill at the hands of Queen Isolt. Accompanied by eight faithful men, including Kurwenal, Tristan set sail for Ireland. As the castle of Dublin came within sight, anchor was dropped until night, when the vessel proceeded within half a mile of shore. Then Tristan, disguised in ragged garments, had himself cast adrift in a small boat containing nothing else save his harp and some provisions. The little vessel was sighted by those on shore, who put out in boats, and when they neared the drifting shell they heard a man's singing voice accompanied by a harp. When plied with questions Tristan glibly wove for them a story of his life: how he once had been a courtier who turned mer-

chant and as such put to sea, was overcome by pirates who spared his life and cast him adrift in a small boat, wounded though he was. The men of Dublin took him ashore, and quickly the story of the wounded minstrel spread, soon reaching the ears of the Queen Isolt, who asked that he be carried to her castle. She had the wounded man — who called himself Tantris — brought before her, and pledged herself to care for his wounds if in exchange he would play and sing for her and her daughter, Isolt, and would teach the latter his skill in singing and harping. This he did, besides imparting to her much other knowledge which he possessed, so that, in brief time, the virgin Isolt became famous for her manners and wisdom and skill in arts.

Meanwhile Tristan, as Tantris, was enjoying the healing art of the Queen, and under her care began to convalesce; as he improved physically he feared that some one might recognise him as the Tristan who slew Morold, so he planned to leave Ireland as soon as possible. And he cunningly told the Queen that he was a married man and that he feared if

he did not return to his native country and claim his wife she would be given to another. So the Queen granted him a year's leave of absence, and Tristan returned to Cornwall.

King Marke and his court greeted Tristan with joy at his return. Tristan told the story of his ruse and of his recovery, and he prated much of the beauty of the Princess Isolt. Some of the followers at King Marke's court began to distrust Tristan because of his seemingly impossible venture in Ireland, and it now happened that an enmity toward Tristan began to develop among the nobles of this court, and this feeling progressed until Tristan realised that his life was in danger. The nobles resented the idea of Tristan becoming their king at the death of Marke, so they proposed that the King take a bride and provide the country with an heir. Marke scouted the idea at first, but even Tristan insisted upon its serious consideration, for he realised that if this were done the nobles' hatred toward him would cease. So the matter was finally put before the council of the nobles to decide, and they, harping upon the feud that existed

between Cornwall and Ireland, suggested that King Marke woo the Princess Isolt for his wife. Tristan hailed this decision with delight and said that he would go in person to Ireland to woo Isolt for Marke. He chose twenty of his worst enemies and eighty others to accompany him, and set sail for Ireland.

He employed his usual diplomatic cunning in making a landing, pretending that he and his boat companion, Kurwenal—the remainder having been left at sea in the vessel—were merchants. Thus the two gained shore, and Tristan's adventures soon began. It happened that a dragon was infesting the land and was such a menace that King Gurmun promised the hand of his daughter, the Princess Isolt, to anyone who would slay this beast. Tristan was quick to seize this opportunity, so he set forth, met the monster and slew it, after a fierce and dramatic battle. He cut out its tongue; then, exhausted by the fray, he sank into slumber and was overcome by the dragon's venom. One of the stewards of the King was in love with Isolt and had planned to win her by slaying the dragon,

even though she detested him. Hearing the wild noise of the battle, he suspected that his opportunity had arrived. He set forth, finding the dead dragon, cut off its head, had it taken to the castle, and then proceeded to establish his claim to the hand of the King's daughter. Isolt and her mother, sorely grieved at the possibility of this marriage, rode forth to verify the report of the slain dragon. They found the beast, and, incidentally, they discovered the unconscious Tristan stifled by the venom of the dragon's tongue which he carried as trophy. The Queen Isolt, nimble in the arts of healing—as has been mentioned before—revived the knight, whom they recognised as Tantris, the minstrel, and in answer to his pleading they secretly had him conveyed to the castle. The following day Tantris had recovered sufficient strength to satisfy the Queen's questionings, and he, as usual, told a fictitious story about having turned merchant and having landed on the coast of Ireland. There he heard of the dragon's menacing presence and had waited his opportunity to slay it.

The steward was meanwhile pressing his claim for Isolt, and he was confronted by the Queen's assertion that another had killed the dragon. Ready to prove his right, the steward offered to meet the other claimant in battle, and the Queen pledged herself to produce him. Tantris was still secreted in the castle, and when the day for the battle approached the Princess Isolt ordered his weapons and armour to be made ready. Swayed by curiosity, she drew his sword from its scabbard and noticed that a sliver of steel had been sprung out of its edge. She pondered this for a long time and recalled the bit of steel which had been found lodged in the brainpan of her uncle Morold when they brought his body to Ireland for burial after the fatal combat in Cornwall with Tristan. Her mother had kept this piece of steel, and the maid went to fetch it. All doubt vanished when she noted that the sliver of steel fitted accurately into the dented edge of Tantris' sword, and then she realised that "Tantris" was but a transposition of the syllables of "Tristan." Quick and determined in her resolve, she grasped the betraying sword and

went to slay Tantris. She found him in his bath, told him of her discoveries and that she had come to slay him. Tristan stayed her with argument; meanwhile the Queen came to the door, and hearing the conversation she hindered the Princess from murdering Tristan, reminding her that she had promised Tantris protection while he remained in Ireland. Brangäna appeared and the three took counsel and decided that some important mission must have brought Tristan to Ireland. The Queen then heard from Tristan the true reasons for his coming: to woo the Princess Isolt for King Marke and to make peace between Cornwall and Ireland. This appealed to the Queen, who sent for King Gurmun and told him the whole tale, and the King was agreed to it all. The steward who claimed the hand of the Princess Isolt was entirely routed by Tristan's proof. Then a vessel was made ready to convey Isolt to Cornwall. She was accompanied by Brangäna, and Tristan assumed command of the party. Queen Isolt brewed a love potion and gave it to Brangäna with instructions to pour it out for King Marke and Isolt on the wedding night.

Far from being in love with Tristan, Isolt loathed him for killing her uncle Morold, and was heartbroken at leaving Ireland. During the voyage Tristan attempted many times to console her, but she repulsed him and reproached him with the death of Morold. The voyage did not agree with her, and the ship was brought to anchor at some port, so that the women might rest. While most of the party went ashore, Brangäna among them, Tristan came to Isolt's cabin to console her, and he called for something to drink. A waiting maid found the glass of love potion in Brangäna's cabin, and this was served to Tristan and Isolt. Brangäna came on board in time to see them quaff the potion, and she was in despair; but she did not acquaint the two with the powers of the drink.

From that time an unquenchable longing possessed both Tristan and Isolt; they yearned for each other, and each one fought against the surging passion that now swayed them. Finally they languished under the strain and confided their secret to Brangäna. She, knowing, took compassion upon them and that night

led Tristan to Isolt's cabin. Before the ship reached Cornwall a fear overtook the lovers that King Marke would discover their perfidy, so they prevailed upon Brangäna to lie with King Marke on the wedding night. This she did, taking the place of Isolt as the lights were extinguished; and when King Marke called for wine and lights, Isolt slipped in and took her place beside him, allowing Brangäna to escape, so that Marke did not discover the trick.

Deceit now followed deceit, and the lovers were much with each other in secret. Isolt began to fear that Brangäna might betray them, so she hired two ruffians to lure her into the wood and put her to death; but they took pity on Brangäna, spared her life, and tied her to a tree, reporting to Isolt that Brangäna had been killed. At this Isolt burst into such remorse that the two ruffians confessed their stratagem, and Brangäna was released and returned to Isolt.

King Marke's suspicions really began with the discovery made by one of his stewards, Marjodo by name, who roomed with Tristan. Roused by a nightmare of a wild boar, Marjodo

awoke one night and proceeded to tell Tristan of his dream. But Tristan was absent from the room. It had been snowing, and by means of the footprints in the courtyard Marjodo tracked Tristan to the Queen's quarters, entered, and was convinced by what he heard that Tristan and Isolt were lovers. Marjodo had harboured a secret love for Isolt, so, actuated more by jealousy than by loyalty, he went to King Marke and told him of his suspicion. The King tried to trip Isolt into a confession by his nightly conversations with her, while Marjodo and a dwarf, Melot, were set to spy upon Tristan. Brangäna came to the rescue of the two lovers by suggesting that they be most guarded in their actions and that they meet only in the garden at night. She conceived the device of having Tristan carve the letters T and I on bits of wood and throw these into the brook so that they might be carried to the Queen, as the brook flowed past the Kemenate.

The King, plotting to trap the lovers, announced that he was going a-hunting and would remain away twenty days, asking that his nobles join him. Tristan made his excuses, pleading

illness, and King Marke departed. As soon as he was gone Tristan marked a bit of wood with the initials agreed upon and threw his love's messenger into the brook, whence it was carried to Isolt. She hastened into the garden, and under the tree the lovers met and embraced. This was seen from the distance by the spying Melot, but the dwarf did not recognise Isolt. Yet he hastened to King Marke, who was waiting at a nearby place in the forest, and told him to accompany him on the following night, promising to show him the erring twain. Again did Tristan signal Isolt on the next night; but as he waited for her to respond, he noticed that the full moon threw upon the sward the shadows of two men, who were in the tree, and who were none other than the King and Melot. In despair Tristan awaited his fate and did not hasten to greet Isolt as she approached. She, having been made suspicious by his hesitation, looked carefully about and saw the figures of the men shadowed on the grass. Quick in her cunning, she spoke to Tristan at a distance, and the two conversed so that King Marke's mind was disarmed of all suspicion.

Yet the King's spies gave him no peace. And soon afterward he purposely again left Isolt and Tristan in the same dwelling while he went to early mass, but before going he strewed flour about Isolt's bed. Warned by Brangäna, Tristan hastened to his love as soon as the King had gone. He saw the flour and leaped across the border that had been laid about the bed to trap him. In doing so, however, he ruptured a vein and bled profusely, staining the bedclothes. King Marke returned in due time and noted that the border of flour was unmarked by footsteps, but he quickly saw the traces of blood and questioned the Queen, who declared that she had burst a vein. King Marke quickly went into another chamber, where Tristan was abed, and with a cheery admonition to get up, he tore the covers from Tristan, seeing that they were stained with blood. Then the King said nothing, but he left the room.

Soon afterward King Marke caused a council of his churchmen to be assembled, and before them he placed the whole matter of Isolt's alleged faithlessness. The council decided

that she was to be submitted to the test of having a red-hot iron placed upon her, and that if she remained unscarred she would then have proven her innocence. This ordeal was to be held at Karliun, whither they went by vessel. And Isolt, with quick cunning, wrote Tristan a letter and asked him to repair to this place at once, disguised as a pilgrim. This he did, and when the vessel bearing Isolt dropped anchor she asked that none other than the pilgrim carry her ashore, this pilgrim being Tristan. Then, when the council of bishops and prelates was assembled, Isolt swore an oath that she had been in the arms of no other men save King Marke and the pilgrim who carried her ashore, and she touched the red-hot iron to prove her virtue and the truth of her oath. The iron did not burn Isolt, and she was welcomed by her King and her people. Then, for a time, her innocence remained unquestioned.

But Isolt and Tristan could not hide their love; so after a period of patient watching King Marke frankly told them that he was convinced of the love that existed between them, but that,

instead of revenging himself by murder, he wished them to leave his castle together. And this they did, wandering forth into the forest, where they found a grotto that had been carved out of stone by giants in ages past. Here the two lovers led an ideal and undisturbed existence, until one day there came upon their ears the sound of hunters. They suspected that King Marke and his horde were abroad in the wood, so they went to bed, but lay far from each other and placed Tristan's unsheathed sword between them.

It happened that in the roof of this cave — the *Minnegrotte* it is called — there were three windows. One of King Marke's hunters, happening upon the spot, peered in at one of the windows and quickly reported to King Marke what he had seen. The King followed his guide and gazing in saw Tristan and Isolt asleep, but with drawn sword between them, as above described. At this the King's heart softened and his breast glowed anew with love at the sight of Isolt's beauty. He argued with himself that the unsheathed sword between the two lovers proved their innocence. Soon after-

ward he sent for them and took them back to Tintagel, warning them to comport themselves so that none might find occasion to suspect them.

For a while the lovers kept apart, but the love in the heart of Isolt leaped the barriers of precaution and she went one day into her garden, dismissing her attendants, all save Brangäna. Then she bade Tristan come to her to give her counsel. He came, and soon the King entered the Kemenate, demanding to know where Isolt was. Brangäna was terror-stricken and could do none other than point toward the garden. There King Marke found Tristan and Isolt asleep in each other's arms. He hastened to summon his henchmen so that they too might see and be convinced of the deed, but Tristan awoke at the sound of the retreating steps of the King and made ready and boarded a ship at the earliest moment and sailed away. For half a year he roamed in strange countries, then a longing overcame him and he returned to his native land, Parmenie, hoping that there he would hear some news of his beloved Isolt. He found that his

foster father Rual had died and that his sons ruled. Here Tristan beguiled his time with hunting, and hearing that a war was in progress between the Duke Jovelin of Arundel and his neighbours, Tristan hurried into the fray. He aided the Duke to victory and became famed in Arundel for his bravery.

Now the Duke Jovelin had a son Kaêdîn and a daughter, Isolt of the White Hand, and to the latter Tristan devoted himself, teaching her to play upon stringed instruments. In his heart there was a tremendous longing for his one love, Isolt, and he was most unhappy. So it came that he frequently sang to Isolt of the White Hand, and the text of his chansons was most often:

"Isot ma drue, Isot m'amie,
En vous ma mort, en vous ma vie!"

Isolt of the White Hand believed Tristan to be in love with her and she encouraged him, incited by the advice of her brother Kaêdîn, who foresaw in this alliance a most advantageous good for the country. Tristan suffered with much unrest of heart and was bitter that Isolt of Cornwall sent him no tidings.

Abruptly Gottfried von Strassburg's poem ceases at this point, the poet dying before the work could be brought to a conclusion. In the admirable German version of Wilhelm Hertz the tale is brought to its end by the addition of a fragment composed by Thomas the Trouvère. As if by coincidence this fragment begins almost at the precise point at which the Gottfried poem was interrupted. To continue then:

Tristan married Isolt of the White Hand, but he was ready with quick excuse and became her husband in name only. For once his sentiment and loyalty controlled him bodily. He chafed under his marital bargain and longed to roam again, so when a call came from another knight whose lady love had been stolen from him, Tristan eagerly went to his aid. In a battle that came of this mission Tristan was mortally wounded and was carried back to Isolt of the White Hand.

While lying sick with his wound Tristan confided to Kaêdîn that no one save his old love, Isolt, could bring him relief in his physical distress, and he bade Kaêdîn go to Cornwall and fetch Isolt. As schemed by Tristan, Kaêdîn

went to Tintagel disguised as a merchant, but he wore a certain ring to convince Isolt that he was a messenger from Tristan.

Tristan, instructing Kaêdîn about his mission, had told him to set sail for Cornwall in his, Tristan's, boat, in which he would find a white sail and a black one; that if he returned with Isolt he should hoist the white sail, and if he came without her, the black sail should float from the mast.

Now Isolt of the White Hand, having been sent from the room while Tristan confided all this to Kaêdîn, eavesdropped at the wall; and when Kaêdîn's boat approached the shores of Arundel, flying a white sail—Isolt having left Cornwall by stealth immediately she heard of Tristan's distress—Isolt of the White Hand told Tristan that Kaêdîn was displaying a black sail. At this Tristan bewailed his misery, cried out the name "Isolt," turned his face to the wall, and died. When Isolt landed and hastened to Tristan she heard about her the moans of the populace and the mournful tolling of the bells. Then she learned that Tristan had died. She went to where his body was

lying, and with tearless eyes stared into his face and kissed his mouth and cheeks. Then her life ebbed away beside the corpse of her lover.

To this there is appended a Coda, which is missing in the French version, and which deals with King Marke's remorse. It runs that King Marke caused both the bodies to be buried in one grave, and that over the spot where Tristan lay he had planted a grape-vine, while over Isolt a rosebush was placed. And these grew and flourished and intertwined so closely and intricately that no one could force them apart.

There are various other endings in which Tristan comes by his fatal wound in a different manner, but these may easily be dismissed, for the above plan seems the most satisfying conclusion from a poetic-dramatic viewpoint. Any attempt to give in bald prose and in a summary manner even an approximate idea of the beauty of the Gottfried von Strassburg poem must fail. It is a marvellous stuff, a tale so charged with dramatic moments that its appeal to Wagner's theatric sense—with which he

was so amply equipped—must have been immediate.

About the origin and development of the Tristan legend there is a fine and fascinating haze—fascinating for those who love to browse among such lore and trace the dim outlines of fantasy, hovering over the solitary points where the figures of speculation become tangible. At least two important studies have been made of this subject—one by Gaston Paris, "Tristan et Iseud," and the other by Dr. Wolfgang Golther, "Die Sage von Tristan und Isolde." Dr. Golther has also contributed a paper to the Munich "Allgemeinen Zeitung," in which he deals concisely with the intricate woof of the legend's origin.

It is generally conceded and commonly accepted that "Tristan and Isolde" is of Keltic beginnings. Dr. Golther, however, speculates interestingly as follows: The beginning of the Tristan legend occurred about 1150, and it was the product of a French poet who drew upon his fantasy for it. During the course of the narrative he wove into the thread of his

story episodes that can be traced to many different lands. The name of this original author of the legend is hopelessly in the dark, but it is to be presumed that he was a minstrel. His tale seems to have found favour quickly, for soon other minstrels and poets adopted this theme as their own, embroidering new romance about the central idea. The names of some of these Tristan poets have survived,—Beroul and Breri, for instance,—but the writings themselves have disappeared, save a few fragments. Chrétien de Troyes is also accredited with having written a Tristan version, but this work is lost. Then Thomas of Brittany, an Anglo-Norman, made the theme his own and composed a poem that is the basis for the version of "Tristan and Isolde" as we know it to-day. It was upon the work of Thomas of Brittany that Gottfried von Strassburg builded, and it was in turn upon Gottfried von Strassburg, as we have stated, that Wagner based his drama. Unfortunately there is practically nothing of great interest or value known about the life of Gottfried von Strassburg save that he composed his Tristan poem

at the beginning of the thirteenth century, and that death took him away before he had completed the work. The poem of Thomas of Brittany has disappeared, save for some fragments, but there exists a prose version of this poem, done into old Norwegian and made in 1226 at the instance of King Hakon Hakonarson, and from this it has been possible to discover the complete outline of the course of events hymned into verse by this poet. Another German version of the Tristan legend is to be found in the poem of Eilhart von Oberg, dating from about 1175, who drew upon some crude French scheme for his material.

Thus Dr. Golther brings to notice the most obvious beginnings of the legend, and traces its principal developments simply, leading the reader in a line as straight as possible from out of the maze of unknown and doubtful origins to the present world-famous Wagner version. It seems a rational, logical path to follow, and it leads the way out of the tangle with faint clearness.

As the Gottfried von Strassburg poem was left uncompleted, two poets of his time under-

took the task of carrying the work to its end—Ulrich von Türnheim and Heinrich von Freiberg. Then, six centuries later, Hermann Kurtz published a version in modern German which appeared in 1844, and was followed, 1855, by a version edited by Karl Simrock. In 1877 Wilhelm Hertz published still another modern version of the Gottfried von Strassburg poem, and this latter form is praised as being by far the finest in its poetical value and its fine sense for the values of the original text. It is, indeed, a beautiful piece of work. Hertz, instead of employing the endings of Gottfried's German continuators, had recourse to some Tristan fragments of the thirteenth century, credited to Thomas the Trouvère. For a time it was believed that this was the minstrel Thomas of Brittany, whose work had been the original poetic source for Gottfried von Strassburg, but Hertz finds enough contradictions to enable him to state with certainty that Thomas of Brittany and Thomas the Trouvère were two different poets.

The English forms of Tristan begin with that of Sir Thomas Malory, who, in his "Morte

Darthur," devotes a great deal of space to the tale, but succeeds in telling an unsatisfactory story. It is believed that Malory leaned upon the version of Eilhart von Oberg for his scheme.

So the legend has come down to us and, in English, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and Algernon Swinburne have helped perpetuate it. The first of these three poems occurs in "Idylls of the King" as "The Last Tournament," and it may be readily dismissed as being unimportant as a contribution to the literature relating to Tristan. Swinburne tells the tale exquisitely, and Matthew Arnold deals only with the episode of Tristan's death.

Sir Walter Scott, nourishing a belief that the Tristan legend took form in Wales, edited a version which was supposedly the composition of Thomas the Rhymer, who was believed to be a poet of the fourteenth century. Walter Scott's work was finished early in the nineteenth century. Still later, and of only passing interest, is a dramatic version by Comyns Carr, produced at the Adelphi Theatre, London, in September, 1906. Mr. Carr harked

back to the outlines of the story set forth by Sir Thomas Malory in his "Morte Darthur" and rather avoided the dramatic scheme chosen by Wagner. Another modern version is the drama by Arthur Symons, which has not yet been either published or produced.

There remains one feature to be noted in connection with the legend and its origin, and that is the fact that in Dublin there once lived a Princess Izod. D. A. Chart, in a recently published book, "The Story of Dublin," gives the following interesting data on the subject:

"Just opposite the Hibernian Military School is the gate giving access to the old-world village of Chapelizod. Here the houses have an air of faded gentility. They seem to have been built for grander inhabitants than they lodge at present.

"Chapelizod, the chapel of Izod, or Isolde, was the residence of that auburn-haired and passionate Irish princess immortalised in Malory's romance and Wagner's opera. While Tristan, loyal knight and true, was escorting her to her destined husband, King Marke of Cornwall, a love potion drunk by mistake

bound them forever in a wild and frenzied passion, which only found its end when Tristan lay dying in his lonely Breton castle and Isolde came over the sea to perish on his corpse.

"The village now shows no memorial of this famous old story, but its association with the fair Isolde is probably well founded. In Dublin city there was long an 'Izod's Tower' on the walls. The site has been inhabited from prehistoric times, for, on a little hill within the park, some yards west of the Hibernian School, is an ancient grave marked by the usual huge slab of stone resting on several small supports. Here were found skeletons and utensils of remote antiquity, the latter of which are preserved in the Dublin Museum. The square tower of the church, which lies on a hill off the main street, is fourteenth century work. The body of the building is modern, though it contains some ancient inscriptions."

Despite the vagueness of the legend's origin —and it is likely that this shadow of doubt will lengthen with years — so much is certain, however, that if the tale did not originate in France it at least was given to the world by

the French trouvères. And after the minstrels of France had harped its romance this theme was then strung upon the lyres of the German Minnesingers. For centuries this story of the love of Tristan for Isolde travelled from one court to another, but its fullest importance was gained when Wagner imprisoned its romance behind the bars of his immortal music.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMA

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IT SEEMS TO HAVE become the fashion in comparing Wagner's dramatic version of "Tristan and Isolde" with the Gottfried von Strassburg poem, from which it derived, to harp upon the fact that Wagner departed widely from his model. A careful comparison of the two versions would tend to prove that Wagner followed his model very faithfully, and that nearly all of the changes in which he indulged may readily be accounted for by two reasons: the first being the dramatic demands which necessitated compressing and intensifying a very long and, at

times, loosely connected old poem into three acts of a modern stage play; and the second reason being the necessity of ennobling the principal characters. The latter was most important, for, as has been hinted in an earlier chapter, Wagner made of this legend not only a human document, but also a personal one. In a word, "Tristan and Isolde" became, under Wagner's hands, autobiographic. Taking for granted the background of action which preceded the rising of the first curtain, it requires no tense stretch of imagination to translate the character of Tristan into that of Richard Wagner, Isolde into Mathilde Wesendonck, and King Marke into Otto Wesendonck.

The tale of "Tristan and Isolde" came under Wagner's serious notice during his Dresden days, when he made a study of the old legends which, in years to follow, brought forth the poems of "Lohengrin," "Tännhäuser," "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg," "Siegfried's Tod," "Tristan," and "Parsifal." "Siegfried's Tod" became "Götterdämmerung" and eventually its scheme was widened into that of "Der Ring des Nibelungen."

This period lasted from 1842 to 1849, but its influence did not produce any definite framing of the Tristan scheme. Not until the autumn of 1854 have we any proof that the dramatic scheme of a Tristan was clamouring for utterance within Wagner's brain; at this time, however, the previously quoted letter to Liszt shows how firmly the idea has taken root. We know that Wagner was acquainted with the Gottfried von Strassburg epic in the version of Hermann Kurtz, published in 1844, and this book contains the hint, of its author, that certain portions of the Gottfried poem would be effective if incorporated in a tragedy. It is reasonable to believe that in this hint there is to be found the incentive which, having gained hold in Wagner's mind, grew into desire and then, after having become a throbbing experience, formulated itself into the "Tristan and Isolde" drama that has been given by Wagner to the world.

To prove that the version of Hermann Kurtz made a lasting impression upon Wagner, Wolfgang Golther has declared that the scene of the two Isoldes at Tristan's bier was the

model of the meeting of Brünnhilde and Gutrune over the corpse of Siegfried, in the final act of "Götterdämmerung."

A further hint for the dramatic scheme of "Tristan" came in 1855 when Karl Simrock's version of the Gottfried von Strassburg poem appeared. This adaptation did not impress Wagner, but there was a preface which contained a comparison of this legend with the tales of Romeo and Juliet and Hero and Leander. Here, then, out of this apparently meagre hint, is to be traced some of the dramatic symbolism of Wagner's second act: the extinguishing of the torch, as in Hero and Leander, and the dawning of the day, as in Romeo and Juliet.

A still more interesting "borrowing" is to be found in Wagner's third act. The raving of the wounded Tristan and his death in the embrace of his beloved Isolde are both to be found in Matthew Arnold's poem "Tristram and Iseult." Now Arnold's poem was published in London in 1852, when it appeared anonymously, its author being designated as A. Then, in 1853, it was republished, and

the author's full name appeared. In 1855, a year after his "Tristan" drama had begun to take firm hold, Wagner visited London, where he conducted some concerts and worked at the composition of "Die Walküre." It is not at all unlikely that Wagner's attention was called to Matthew Arnold's poem by some of his English friends and that he incorporated the dramatic scheme of its ending into the finale of his music drama.

I have referred above to this as a "borrowing," and the two Simrock hints — of the torch and the dawn — come under the same category, but attention has been called to them only because of the help they give in an attempt to trace the growth and the form of the "Tristan" scheme in Wagner's mind. It is well known that Wagner took the ideas of many men — on one occasion he admitted to Liszt that he had appropriated something of his in "Die Walküre," and some of his other musical borrowings are obvious to the listening ear. But Wagner was a great man who, when he filched the ideas of other men, took them because they suited his scheme, and he did not

rest content with the mere act of appropriation, but he made them his own. So it would occur to no one to credit Matthew Arnold with the dramatic scheme of Wagner's "Tristan" as it stands to-day. That finale belongs to Wagner; it is indisputably his own. And if a thousand poets and as many musicians had been drawn upon to furnish material for such a masterpiece of dramatic-musical literature as "Tristan and Isolde," then Wagner's sentimental debt to all of them would be fully erased by his final achievement.

A far more important influence than the above-mentioned was that of Schopenhauer. Wagner had absorbed a great deal of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and he was more or less under the spell of this when the Tristan idea began to ferment. The scheme of renunciation and the yearning for death may be traced to that source and to Buddhism, which also interested him; and there is scarcely a limit to the pseudo-philosophic meanings that may be read into Wagner's text. One enthusiast has even gone so far as to read Schopenhauer into the mad ravings of Tristan in his

delirium of the third act. This seems the limit of absurdity, for if Wagner had a gospel of philosophy to spread he certainly would not leave it to the mouthing of a man whose brain is seething, scourged by fever. It seems far more rational to take Wagner's excursions into philosophy with mild seriousness. He sampled several kinds, and the spell of the moment was often upon him; but he was a man of many moods, and the buffetting he received at the hands of fate did much to make him fickle in his beliefs. Wagner himself formulated and borrowed many gospels about art and life. He committed volumes full of his writings to paper, and since his death an awesome pile of polemics has accumulated, a great majority of which explain away Wagner's theories and his meaning of them. Seldom has any man so stimulated the pamphleteer; and every conceivable and inconceivable subject that can be associated with Wagner has been dilated upon. And when all is said and done, when all his wavering moods have been chronicled amusingly or have been made the subjects of serious discussion, then out of

this welter of contradictions arises the gigantic figure of the real Wagner — Richard Wagner the musician, the greatest composer the dramatic stage ever has known.

Fortunately Wagner himself survived many of the moods that swayed him for the tense moment. So, for instance, he had planned that at the bier of Tristan, in the third act of the drama, there should appear the wandering Parsifal searching for Montsalvat and the Grail; and not content with this inexcusably undramatic combination, Buddha is also lured into the stage frame. This sketch must have been draughted about 1855 and, fortunately, did not survive revision.

There are evidences other than the foregoing allusion to prove that the themes of "Tristan" and "Parsifal" were closely intertwined in Wagner's mind, and it was not until 1857 that these two dramatic ideas fell apart and became independent. From that time on "Tristan" began to shape itself, and in July of that year Wagner writes about it: "The poem is still slumbering in me; I shall soon call it to life." The following month he drew

up a prose sketch, and on September 18, 1857, the poem of "Tristan" was complete.

So that the reader may readily note the principal differences between the Gottfried von Strassburg version, related in the preceding chapter, and Wagner's dramatic scheme; the latter is outlined here, as follows:

Act I. The forward part of a sailing ship is disclosed. This vessel, steered eastward by Tristan, is headed for Cornwall and is within a few hours' sail of its goal. It bears Isolde, Princess of Ireland, who goes to Cornwall to become the wife of King Marke, having been wooed for this union by Tristan. With Isolde is her companion Brangäna, and these two occupy quarters below and forward of the main deck, where stand Tristan, the steersman, and his henchmen. The women are screened from the others by draperies. As the curtain rises Isolde is lying upon a couch, her head buried in the cushions, while Brangäna peers over the side of the ship. From the masthead there floats down the song of a young sailor, who chaunts a lay to his wild and amorous Irish maid, and Isolde, hearing this,

starts up in rage, demanding to know of Brangäna where they are. When Brangäna tells her that they are approaching Cornwall Isolde's wrath and fury increase, and she vows that she will not set foot on land. Then she laments her impotence over wave and wind, which she would charge to shatter the ship and destroy its human cargo. Stifling with rage, she commands Brangäna to part the draperies so that she may have air to breathe. Brangäna complies, and thus a view of the full length of the ship is shown, discovering Tristan, his knights, and sailors. Isolde sends Brangäna to Tristan and commands him to appear before her. This message is evasively received by Tristan, but his chief henchman, Kurwenal, rises in defiance and mockingly shouts a wild song of Morold and his fate at the hands of Tristan. In consternation Brangäna shuts out the scene and the sound of the song by drawing the curtains. Then she returns to Isolde and repeats Tristan's answer to her command. This unsluices Isolde's confidence, and she now tells her companion how, on an earlier occasion, Tristan had come to

Ireland mortally wounded and had sought healing at her hands. He was disguised as "Tantris," and, not having recognised him at first, Isolde exercised her healing art to save his life. Then, one day, she found in his sword a nick, and into this break there fitted accurately the splinter of steel that was found in Morold's head when it was sent to Ireland after the Irish knight had met death in Cornwall at the hands of Tristan. Morold had been betrothed to wed Isolde; so when she discovered that Tantris was none other than Tristan she at once sought to avenge Morold's death. With bared sword upraised she approached Tristan's cot. He gazed not at the sword, but looked appealingly into her eyes, and she dropped the weapon. She healed his wound and sent him sound back to Cornwall. He swore eternal gratitude and faith, but he soon returned to Ireland and demanded her as a bride for his uncle, Marke, "Cornwall's weary king."

Isolde recounts all this, consumed with rage and furious indignation, and she concludes her tale with a cry for revenge, declaring that

both she and Tristan must die. Brangäna, terrorised by this decision, pleads with Isolde, setting forth the advantages of an alliance with King Marke and declaring that such marriage need not be loveless. With this Brangäna speaks of the magic arts of Isolde's mother, and Isolde, accepting the hint, asks Brangäna to fetch a casket of phials. Out of this Brangäna chooses the love philtre, but Isolde refuses to consider it and selects the bottle containing the death potion. Kurwenal now bursts upon the scene to tell the women that Cornwall is in sight and that they must prepare to go ashore. Isolde commands Kurwenal to tell Tristan to come to her and crave her pardon. He rushes from the scene to comply, and Isolde, affectionately bidding farewell to Brangäna, tells her to pour out the death potion into the gold goblet. An instant after, Tristan appears between the parted curtains, and Isolde immediately reproaches him with neglect during the voyage, to which he pleads that his attitude of aloofness is the one dictated by custom observed by knights who are bringing a bride to their king. Isolde mocks at this and asks Tristan what penance

he has to offer her for having slain her betrothed, Morold. At this Tristan takes his sword out of its scabbard and, offering it to Isolde, asks that she take her revenge; but the Princess tauntingly tells him that she cannot appear before King Marke as the slayer of his choicest knight. Instead, she challenges Tristan to drink to her in repentance, and she orders Brangäna to pour the contents of the phial into the goblet. Brangäna, with obvious gesture, substitutes the love philtre in place of the death potion. This Isolde hands to Tristan, who heroically starts to drain the goblet when Isolde wrenches it from him, drinking the dregs herself. Instead of being beset by the agonies of death, these two find themselves throbbing with the emotions of passion and are soon in each other's arms ecstatically confessing their love. In answer to the question of the bewildered Isolde, Brangäna admits that she poured out the love potion. Maids in waiting drape the royal robe about Isolde, while cries from the sailors and Kurwenal announce that the ship has reached its goal and that King Marke is about to board her, having rowed

out to meet his bride. The curtain falls abruptly upon the scene of Isolde swooning in the ecstasy of her love while Tristan is dazed by his bliss; Brangäna and Kurwenal stand helplessly by while the background is filled with sailors shouting their cheer to King Marke, who is supposed at that moment to board the ship.

The second act plays in the garden adjoining that part of the castle occupied by Isolde. It is a summer night, and from out of the distance there sound, with mysterious indistinctness, the hunting horns of King Marke's party. Isolde and Brangäna are listening to the horn calls, the former with impatience, the latter with prudent judgment. A burning torch is stuck in a ring beside the open castle door, and Isolde, consumed by her passion, is pleading with Brangäna to extinguish the light and so give the signal for Tristan's approach. Brangäna reminds Isolde that the hunting party is still within hearing, and she warns the love-impatient woman that she does not trust Tristan's friend, Melot, who persuaded King Marke to arrange this night's hunt. Isolde

chides her for her caution and her groundless fears, but Brangäna pleads again that Isolde curb her passion and that she refrain from seeing Tristan that night. For answer, Isolde seizes the torch and stifles its glare, ordering Brangäna to ascend the tower and there keep watch. Directly the torch is quenched, Isolde peers into the gloom of the surrounding forest, then unwinds a scarf from about her head, and signals impetuously. Tristan rushes out of the woods and the two lovers embrace with unbridled ardour. They sink upon a bank of flowers and sing of their longings and joys while Brangäna, watching from her tower, sounds several warnings which are unheeded. Then brusquely the bliss of the two lovers is interrupted by Kurwenal, who rushes upon the scene with the cry: "Save yourself, Tristan!" and upon his heels there follow the King and his retinue, including Melot. The King, grief-torn, upbraids Tristan for his treachery, and from his long lament we learn that this marriage with Isolde had been precipitated by Tristan himself. King Marke asks why the present misery and deceit have been forced upon him,

and Tristan confesses that he can frame no answer to his question, but he turns to Isolde and demands to know if she will follow him into the land of darkness. Isolde consents, and as Tristan kisses her upon the forehead, Melot cries treason and demands revenge. Tristan wheels about, drawing his sword. He advances upon Melot, but drops his weapon, receiving Melot's sword in his body. Isolde rushes to her wounded lover, while King Marke restrains Melot, and the curtain sinks.

The third act shows Tristan, thrall to his wound, lying under a tree in the courtyard of the ruins of his ancestral castle in Brittany. All about there are signs of neglect, while in the back the limitless stretches of the sea add to the vast sadness of the picture. Kurwenal bends over the sufferer hearkening for some sign of life, and in the distance there sounds the desolate lament of a shepherd playing his pipe. Gradually Tristan awakes at the sound of the familiar air, and Kurwenal tells him that he is in his old home, Kareol. Tristan now becomes fever-haunted and raves in his longing for Isolde. Kurwenal tells him that he has sent

across the sea for her, so that she might heal his wound, and at this news Tristan grows frantic with impatience and joy. In his feverish imagination he believes he sees the approaching ship, but the shepherd, who is on the watch for the vessel, pipes the sad lay in response to Tristan's delirious question. Then the knight's forces are consumed by his denunciation of the accursed love potion and of the one who brewed it. He falls unconscious and regains speech again in describing a vision he has of Isolde's approach. Feverishly he commands Kurwenal to mount the rampart and sight the ship, and at this moment the shepherd's pipe breaks forth in a jubilant strain which indicates the approach of the vessel. With a bound Kurwenal mounts the heights and shouts to Tristan that Isolde's ship is approaching flying the flag that signalises bliss. The ship disappears behind a cliff, and again there is a moment of anxiety until Kurwenal announces that the vessel's keel is in port and that Isolde has leaped ashore. Tristan commands his henchman to descend to the strand and carry Isolde up to him. Then, in exultation and

delirium, Tristan tears the bandages from his wound; Isolde calls to him and arrives in time to catch him in her arms; he raves for an instant longer about the torch which, in his imagination, is being extinguished. Then, with her name on his lips, he falls lifeless, and Isolde swoons. The shepherd shouts to Kurwenal that a second ship is approaching, and that faithful one, suspecting Isolde has been pursued, barricades the castle portal with stones. Soon there appear Brangäna, followed by Melot, King Marke, and his men. Kurwenal singles out Melot and kills him in battle, but receives his own death wound in doing so; he staggers toward Tristan's corpse and dies. Brangäna finds Isolde regaining consciousness and tells her mistress that she confided to King Marke the secret of the love potion; then the King assures Isolde that finding Tristan innocent of deceit, he had hurried hither to unite the two lovers. Isolde, unconscious of their voices, her expression transfixed, gazes at Tristan's corpse. Chaunting her song of resignation, she falls lifeless across the body of her lover.

This dramatic scheme is wholly admirable for the purpose of a musical setting. The action all takes place before the eyes and ears of the auditor. There is but little retrospect, and the background of incidents that have preceded the rising of the first curtain is neatly "blocked in." Unlike Wagner's "Ring" dramas, which are full of tedious reiteration of incidents, "Tristan and Isolde" is compact, independent, and reasonably free of redundancy.

Each act is planned with fine care for the effectiveness of the climax. There is no anti-climax in the entire drama: the action is cumulative throughout each independent act and throughout the entire music drama. The falling of each act's curtain is upon a climax, and with each curtain the tensity increases until the very close of the work, when, with Isolde's "Liebestod," the drama achieves its highest altitude — and this scheme is the logical one of dramatic construction, even though it be most obvious. There are in "Tristan and Isolde" no loose ends of dramatic action, as there are in "The Ring." At the close the principal

characters are disposed of: Tristan, Isolde, Kurwenal, and Melot having met death in the final act; this leaves only Marke — "Cornwall's weary king," who is, after all, but a pawn in the drama's action — and Brangäna, who has fully served her dramatic purpose. The audience, in general, is not much concerned in the fate of either one of these two characters, and the few curious ones, who long for a complete disposition of all the actors in the drama, may readily fancy King Marke as doomed by his mourning, and Brangäna as returning to her native Ireland.

There is, when one reviews the "Tristan" drama stripped of its music, very little action in the entire work. It is a static drama. And yet, by the trick of music and of promised happening, the auditor is kept in a state of tense expectation from the moment when the action begins to unfold until the stage is strewn with the victims of this sombre plot. The principal incidents in the course of the drama are really the soul events, and it is about these subtle points that the circles of happenings revolve. Wagner felt and appreciated this while at work

on "Tristan and Isolde," for in a later essay, "Music of the Future" (translated by W. Ashton Ellis), he writes of this subject: "I too, as I have told you, felt driven to this 'Whence and Wherefore?' and for long it banned me from the magic of my art. But my time of penance taught me to overcome the question. All doubt at last was taken from me when I gave myself up to 'Tristan.' Here, in perfect trustfulness, I plunged into the inner depths of soul events, and from out this inmost centre of the world I fearlessly built up its outer form. . . . Life and death, the whole import and existence of the outer world, here hang on nothing but the inner movements of the soul. The whole affecting Action comes about for reason only that the inmost soul demands it, and steps to light with the very shape foretokened in the inner shrine."

To the average listener there are two dreary spots in this music drama: the one is King Marke's reproach to Tristan in the last scene of the second act, and the other is Tristan's delirium at the beginning of the final act. The latter incident is all too often made a butt

for the irreverent, who jest sadly because Tristan is a long time a-dying. But the fault here lies with the interpreter, not with the composition. "Tristan" is a tremendous rôle to sing and act—and there are and have been all too few tenors who have been tremendous singers and actors. The same applies to King Marke's monologue in the second act, for when this episode is effectively sung, far from being a bore, it becomes one of the most beautiful incidents in the entire work. But there are too few great bassos, so Wagner is sacrificed to the limitations of the singer, and the demands of the public are appeased by omitting a great part of this beautiful episode, which is seldom heard in its entirety. Of a masterpiece like "Tristan and Isolde," the greatest music drama the world possesses, it is presumptuous to cavil at its duration or at the length of any of its incidents. The work is so complete, is so free from lapses and irregularities of merit, that if its frame is too large for public appreciation, then it is more reasonable to demand that the auditors adjust their appreciation rather than shrink the dimensions of the work. Wagner's

composition is so even, its line of emotional intensity rises so deliberately from the plane of beginnings to the overpowering final climax, that any excisions are apt to affect the work and throw it out of drawing. A performance of "Tristan and Isolde," peopled with singers mighty enough to carry its composer's message intelligently and emotionally to the ears of a present-day audience, would not appear too long, nor would it be punctuated by episodes of tedium. Let us hope that in the near future Wagner may be banished from the concert room—where he has never belonged save for purposes of propaganda—and that in the opera house his works may be heard in their completeness, sung by singers of brains, voice, and yet again brains.

The ethics of Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" drama have provoked storms of arguments and avalanches of protests. There are some good people who believe in their prudish heart of hearts that it is only necessary to show Wagner as the most moral composer in the world in order to prove that he was the

greatest of all musicians. There is scarcely anything else to be met with in the whole Wagner literature that is so amusing and yet so irritating, and no other music drama of this composer has come in for so general a drubbing at the hands of these moralists. They would have us believe all sorts of things — principally that Tristan and Isolde were innocent; and they do not stop to reckon that by so doing they rob these lovers of a great amount of human interest, making them puppets and prigs. And, even when they have shorn these lovers of the sin which surrounds them, they still have not succeeded in gaining for them entry into the list of nursery heroes.

A truce to such foolish arguments. Let us clothe Tristan and Isolde with all of their sins if doing so tends to make them human, and then let us frankly regard them as man and woman, knight and princess of warm flesh and coursing blood. In the drama Tristan sins and dies for it. He throws himself upon Melot's sword, and this act is in expiation of his sinning. That is quite enough — even for moralising disputants. He had betrayed his

King's trust, he was the lover of Isolde. How ardently did he love her? Ask Wagner the musician, not Wagner the dramatist, and you will hear a satisfying answer in the torrid love music of the second act. How often had they met in the time that is supposed to elapse between the first and second acts? No one knows, just as no one knows how great a time is supposed to have passed between these two events. Does it matter at all? They had arranged a code of signals: the quenching of the torch; they had arranged that Brangäna guard their meetings by watching from the tower. In addition there had been time for Melot to have his suspicions confirmed and to coax King Marke into the plan of the midnight hunt, arranged as a feint so that the lovers be trapped.

What is Tristan's guilt, and why blink it? So far as the dramatic value of "Tristan and Isolde" is concerned, nothing whatever is gained by refurbishing the moral character of its hero, while, to the contrary, much is lost by sacrificing the human interest of the work to make a holiday for moralists. Let us accept

"Tristan and Isolde" as a human document. There is ample data in the Wesendonck incident and in the letters that have come down to us from that period to substantiate the belief that, passing through Wagner's hands, "Tristan and Isolde" became a message, a chronicle of Wagner's love for Mathilde Wesendonck. Accepting this viewpoint, the work takes on another, or at least a renewed interest. It seems entirely reasonable and logical to believe that Tristan and Isolde loved and sinned, and that they died for their love. If the text does not make this perfectly clear at all points, then at least the music does.

The fact that King Marke set sail after the fleeing Isolde, when she sped to the dying Tristan in answer to Kurwenal's call, proves little for the case of the moral purists. It is true that King Marke, when he learned from Brangäna the secret of the love potion, hastened to tell Isolde that he understood all and that Tristan and she were to be given each other in marriage, but there is nothing elsewhere to show that Marke had any other than a political interest in his alliance with Isolde. So this

act of reparation, if as such it be regarded, reflects but little sentimental or emotional credit upon the King.

A feature in the drama that has been assailed as a vulnerable point is the love potion, which has been criticised for being dramatically weak and excessively old-fashioned. It bears, on the face of it, both of these weaknesses, but by altering the original scheme of the legend, and having Tristan and Isolde in love with each other before the rising of the first curtain, Wagner minimises the importance of the love philtre and reduces its crudeness as a dramatic agent. It serves the purpose, in the Wagner drama, of merely unleashing the bonds of reserve which Tristan had fettered upon himself. By means of it there is visited upon the pair of lovers a single moment of irresponsibility, after which the love they bear each other is sufficient in itself to precipitate the calamity. If the very idea of a love potion were not such an out-moded and stilted dramatic device, it is doubtful if any severer criticism would be waged against it than is brought to bear against the device of the book

as employed in "Paolo and Francesca," where the reading of the love of Launcelot for Guinevere is the means of unbarring the love between Paolo and Francesca.

Wagner may easily be forgiven for having employed so trite a means as the love philtre. It is used in the original legend, and it distinctly suited Wagner's purpose of ennobling the character of Tristan, since it was necessary to make Tristan a creature of emotional impulse for a moment at least so that his armour of chivalrous loyalty to King Marke might be pierced and the drama thus launched. After all, Wagner's drama does not revolve about the love potion, but about the love of Tristan and Isolde, and this existed before the fatal cup touched the lips of either protagonist.

We have contended before that the alleged influence of Schopenhauer upon Wagner, as evinced in this drama, may be freely discounted, but we cannot deny the distinct presence of this philosopher's teachings in the finale, as invented by Wagner. Here is vividly expressed the negation of life, and one feels the force of this undertow throughout the entire ending.

Surmises, on the question of this influence, are welded into certainty by the coincidence that, in the very letter to Franz Liszt in which occurs the first mention of the "Tristan and Isolde" project, Wagner refers to the Schopenhauer influence in the following conclusive words:

"Apart from slowly progressing with my music, I have of late occupied myself exclusively with a man who has come like a gift from heaven, although only a literary one, into my solitude. This is Arthur Schopenhauer, the greatest philosopher since Kant, whose thoughts, as he himself expresses it, he has thought out to the end. The German professors ignored him very prudently for forty years; but recently, to the disgrace of Germany, he has been discovered by an English critic. All the Hegels, etc., are charlatans by the side of him. His chief idea, the final negation of the desire of life, is terribly serious, but it shows the only salvation possible. To me of course that thought was not new, and it can indeed be conceived by no one in whom it did not pre-exist, but this philosopher was

the first to place it clearly before me. If I think of the storm of my heart, the terrible tenacity with which, against my desire, it used to cling to the hope of life, and if even now I feel this hurricane within me, I have at least found a quietus which in wakeful nights helps me to sleep. This is the genuine, ardent longing for death, for absolute unconsciousness, total non-existence; freedom from all dreams is our only final salvation."

The gist of this attitude and teaching finds application especially in Isolde's death, which is one of absolute and beatific resignation. Were it not for the direct reference by Wagner, in the above quoted letter, to the Schopenhauer philosophy, and did we not know that Wagner was prey to most theories that came within his ken, it would be easy to account for Isolde's death as being simply the result of a broken heart; but Wagner cannot be divorced entirely from his numerous theories, although the world is gradually and sensibly refusing to take his excursions into philosophy with profound seriousness. Wagner's own life, his own experiences, taught him his gravest

lessons, and if he had not come under the dominant influence of Mathilde Wesendonck, it is doubtful if Schopenhauer alone would, by his teachings, have precipitated "Tristan and Isolde."

As we see and hear the finale to this drama now, it seems the only rational and effective stage ending that could have been designed, and yet it was entirely original with Wagner, if the Matthew Arnold poem can be proven to have been without influence upon Wagner. I have not contended, and do not contend, that Wagner ever leaned upon this poem, nor do I know whether it ever came to his sight, but the coincidence noted is too interesting to pass by without notice.

It must not be understood that all the foregoing praise of this drama is meant to apply to it as a drama for acting without the music. In fact I can imagine a stage performance of this Wagner version, minus music, as being dismally dull and untheatric. Strip the poem of its music, read it without even a thought of its musical background and foreground, and dramatic weaknesses become obvious.

It has so often been the favourite belief of great men that they were of minor greatness in just the art in which they were most successful. And so Wagner, to his dying day, fondly thought he was a great poet, and that poetry and not music was his *métier*. So long as he did not forsake music for poetry, we can smile at this illusion. But at the same time we are grateful that he was enough of a poet to write his own libretti — certainly no other poet could, by need or chance, have been harnessed to Wagner, who, in his minute demands for a text, would have been an impossible mate for a collaborator. Yet it seems foolish in the face of some of the doubtful poetry contained in the "Tristan and Isolde" libretto to claim for Wagner the laurels of a great poet. He was a great librettist for opera or music drama — the greatest the world has known; but a poet among poets he was not. Admitting that his text for this drama is not great poetry, it commands unbounded admiration for its author's cleverness in moulding his thoughts in so elastic a metric form that it yields gracefully and effectively to a wedding

with music. Its word play and its syllable play — inane as some of these tricks sound in the mere reading — are most happily planned for musical expression, while its short lines and its malleable phrases are admirable for the rhythmic and melodic demands of music. This text proves, more than a thousand theories, that with Wagner the word and the music came to life together. His inner ear must have tried the tonal value of the word with consummate critical fineness. As a poet Wagner was probably third or fourth rate, but as a writer of texts for his music dramas he was a master, and as a musician he was supreme. And this leads us to a discussion of the most important part of "Tristan and Isolde"; namely, its music.

CHAPTER VI

THE MUSIC: ACT I

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THE MUSIC: ACT I

> I'M COMPOSING AWAY [at 'Tristan and Isolde'] as if I meant to work at nothing else my whole life long, and in return it will be finer than anything I've ever done; the smallest phrase has the import to me of a whole act, with such attention am I carrying it out."

This sentence, from a letter written by Wagner to Mathilde Wesendonck, gives a fine estimate of the minute care which the composer was lavishing upon the music of "Tristan and Isolde" while it was springing to life

in his brain and was being committed to music paper. And yet the draught of inspiration was so great that, in the hearing, these wonderful details serve but to accelerate the sense of speed with which this music is unfurled before our ears. In other words, there is in this music drama no obvious sign of an obstinate pursuit of a fixed musical system which, in its detail, clogs the swift course of the musical stream.

There are thousands of opinions about the personality of Wagner, ranging from blind idolatry to that of unreasoning hate, and there are widely different judgments about his dramatic and poetic abilities. But, accepting the music drama as an artistically legitimate successor to the out-moded form of old-fashioned opera, there can scarcely be an honest estimate of this music which does not admit its greatness as a tonal mirror of human emotions. The uncurbed flow of impassioned music is here too great to brook objections. It may not appeal to the every individual of a music-loving multitude, for there are those who prefer the pellucid placidness of Mozart to the

turbulence of Wagner: this is a matter largely of temperament. But, given a nature receptive to the appeal of swirling human emotions, this work is without a peer. To such of humanity "Tristan and Isolde" is beyond the pale of discussion: it stands alone in its towering height of turbulence—even among the works of Richard Wagner.

Its composer has designated this work as a "Handlung in drei Aufzügen," which may be translated as an "action in three acts"—note that here Wagner avoided the use of the term "music drama." Nevertheless, it is a most noteworthy example of music drama, and it bears less resemblance to the conventional opera form, with its fixed divisions into solo numbers and concerted pieces, than almost any other of his compositions.

A Prelude prefaces the rising of the first curtain. During the harrowing Paris days of 1860, when Wagner was trying to gain for himself a foothold on French soil—before the memorable insult of the "Tannhäuser" fiasco—he gave three concerts at the Théâtre des Italiens, and at one of these the Prelude to

"Tristan and Isolde" was performed. In order to introduce this work to the French public Wagner wrote a detailed programme note explaining the dramatic meaning of the music. This explanation is to be found in the following paragraphs, and it is especially interesting because we read from it that the Prelude was intended not only as a mood preface to the first act, but was supposed to contain the general scheme of the entire opera:

"An old, old tale, exhaustless in its variations, and ever sung anew in all the languages of mediæval Europe, tells us of Tristan and Isolde. For the King the trusty vassal had wooed a maid he durst not tell himself he loved—Isolde; as his master's bride she followed him, for, powerless, she needs must do the wooer's bidding. Love's Goddess, jealous of her downtrod rights, avenged herself: the love drink destined by the careful mother for the partners in this merely political marriage, in accordance with the customs of the age, the Goddess foists on the youthful pair through a blunder diversely accounted for; fired by its

draught, their love leaps suddenly to vivid flame, and each avows to each that they belong to none save one another. Henceforth no end to the yearning, longing, bliss and misery of love: world, power, fame, splendour, honour, knighthood, loyalty and friendship, all scattered like a baseless dream; one thing alone left living: desire, desire unquenchable, longing forever rebearing itself, —a fevered craving; one sole redemption— death, surcease of being, the sleep that knows no waking!

"Here, in Music's own most unrestricted element, the musician who chose this theme as introduction to his love drama could have but one care: how to restrain himself, since exhaustion of the theme is quite impossible. So in one long breath he let that unslaked longing swell from its first avowal of the gentlest tremor of attraction, through half-heaved sighs, through hopes and fears, laments and wishes, joy and torment, to the mightiest onset, most resolute attempt to find the breach unbarring to the heart a path into the sea of endless love's delight. In vain! Its power spent,

the heart sinks back to pine of its desire — desire without attainment; for each fruition sows the seeds of fresh desire, till in its final lassitude the breaking eye beholds a glimmer of the highest bliss: it is the bliss of quitting life, of being no more, of last redemption into that wondrous realm from which we stray the farthest when we strive to enter it by fiercest force. Shall we call it Death? Or is it not Night's wonder-world, whence — as the story says — an ivy and a vine sprang up in lockt embrace o'er Tristan and Isolde's grave?"

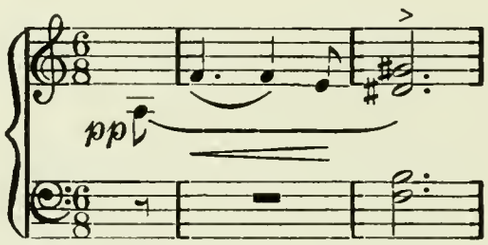
In this Prelude, then, will be found not only the love scheme of the entire work, but also will be heard many of the leading themes of the first act. It is commonly known that Wagner employed a system of themes to characterise persons, moods, and incidents. These are called, in the German, *Leitmotive;* that is, leading motives or themes. He did not invent this system, but he developed it into a musical science. Thus he acquired with a single stroke the advantage over opera composers of the dark operatic ages; for he had two means of speaking to his audience: through the mouths

of his characters and through the medium of his orchestra. By vesting a musical phrase with a given meaning, Wagner's orchestra is able to communicate to the audience definite messages. He employs it frequently to anticipate the action and to communicate the thoughts or designs of his characters. That so convenient a system tempted many abuses is to be imagined and is also easily pardonable. It presupposes, to the fullest understanding of the work, a complete knowledge of each theme in its various changes of form.

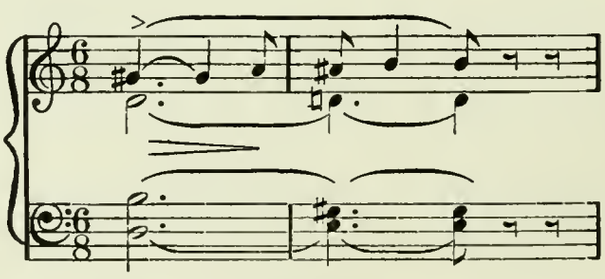
Now shortly after the Wagner works came to public notice, the world was burdened by pamphlets of analysis in which almost every tiny musical moment was accounted for by an explanation and was duly tagged for identification. The result was that a large number of enthusiasts spent their time memorising these leading themes so that they recognised them at hearing, and thus it frequently happened that because of this attentive listening for the detail the effect of the entire work was lost. Therein lies the danger of such exigent analysis. It is not at all necessary to an intelligent com-

prehension of "Tristan and Isolde" that every theme in it be known by heart, and I have attempted, in the following discussion of the music of this work, to keep the number of themes quoted within rational bounds, letting their importance determine their mention.

The opening of the Prelude, the first four notes voiced by the 'cello, form the theme of "Love's Confession":

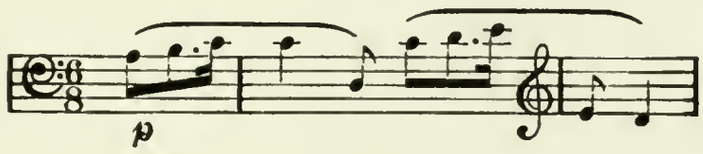


In itself this is musically incomplete, its last note being the beginning of the concluding phrase, which is a chromatically ascending passage of four notes again, sounded by the woodwind, and this is called "Desire":

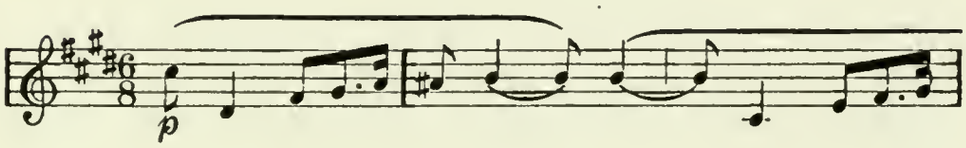


If there is any one theme which may be called the motto of this work, it is the last mentioned one. It occurs in every scene in each of the three acts, and its trend of longing is the basic mood of this music drama.

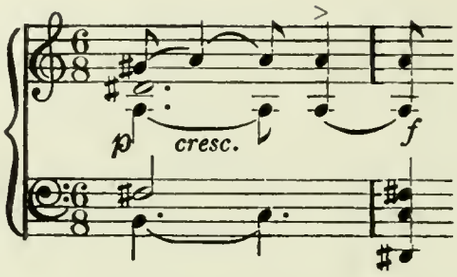
There follows some play upon these themes, and then is heard the motive of "The Glance," a sentimental, sighing phrase chaunted by the 'celli:



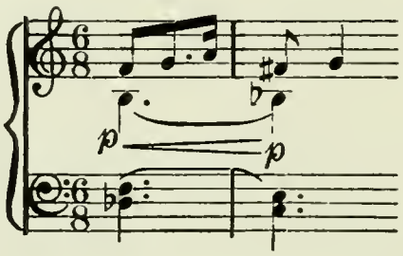
The next new theme heard is that of the "Love Potion":



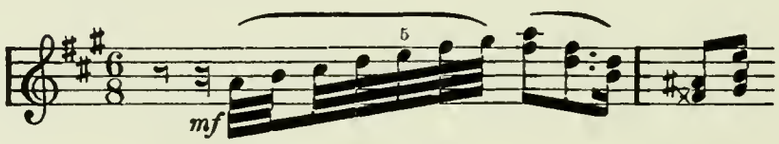
and, as in the opening phrase, its conclusion is formed by another theme, that of the "Death Potion," with its ominous descent in the double bass and 'celli:



The next theme is that of the "Magic Casket":

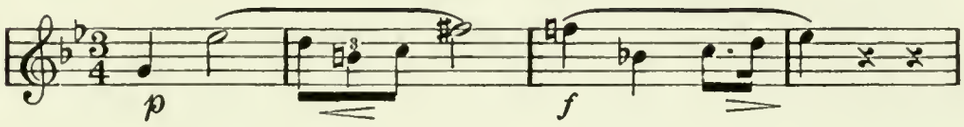


And the final new motive in this Prelude is that of "Exultant Love":



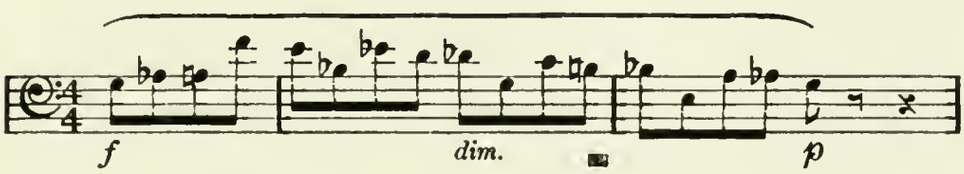
This theme is employed in the Prelude to bring about the tremendous climax, after which there is a precipitate change of mood, from exultant triumph to unfulfilled longing; and then the preface to this music drama moodily closes. At the parting of the curtain the deck of Tristan's ship is seen, and there is

heard the song of the seaman, containing a theme which is known as the "Sea," and is employed a number of times in the first act in connection with the voyage of Tristan's ship:



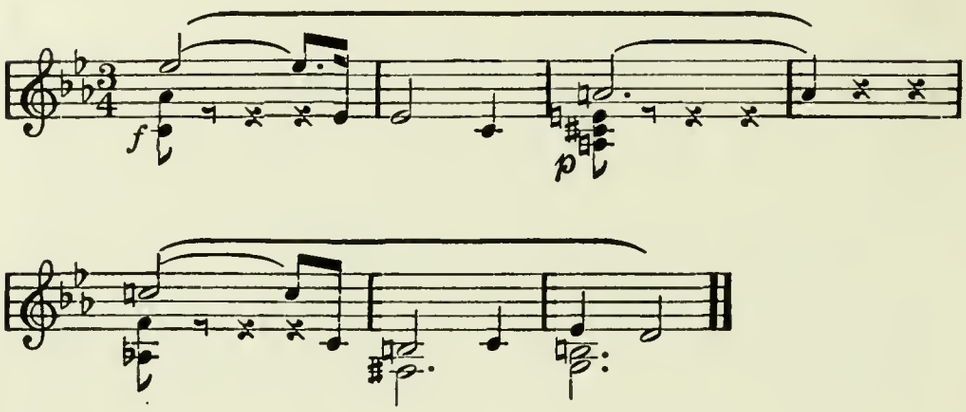
This theme is one of the few in the work which is used to describe external pictures, in distinction to mood pictures; but it can scarcely be called programmatic in any sense.

Immediately after the song has ceased, Isolde rises from her couch, goaded to fury by the song of the sailor. The theme heard here is that of "Anger":

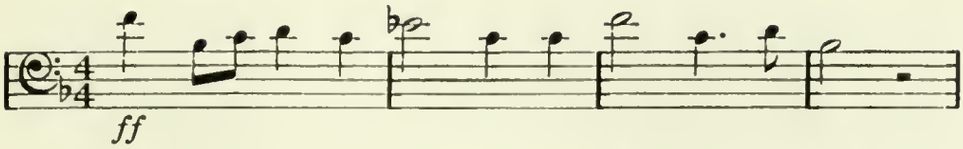


Isolde's wrath grows with every moment until she succumbs to her fury, and strangling with rage at Tristan's perfidy, she commands her maid and confidant, Brangäna, to part the

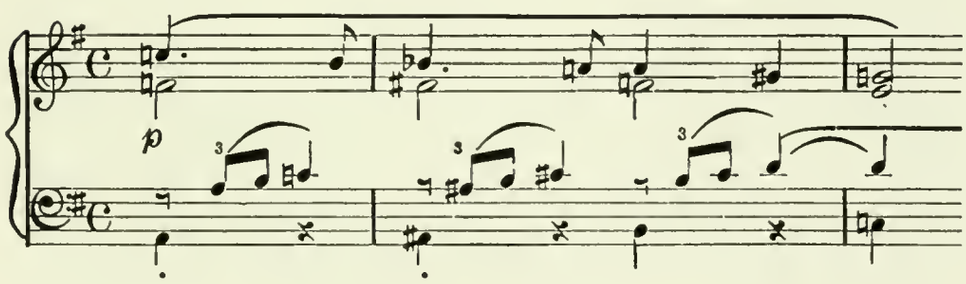
curtains which separate her quarters from the remainder of the ship. Then Tristan is seen standing at the helm. Fixing her eyes upon him, Isolde chaunts her theme of treachery and revenge, and here for the first time the motive of "Death" is heard:



There follows now the scene between Isolde and Brangäna, in which the latter is sent to approach Tristan and desire his presence before her mistress. This request is answered evasively by Tristan; but his henchman, Kurwenal, takes up his master's cause and trolls forth a defiant and cynical reply to Isolde, reminding her of Tristan's victory over Morold; and here is heard a new theme, called "Glory to Tristan":

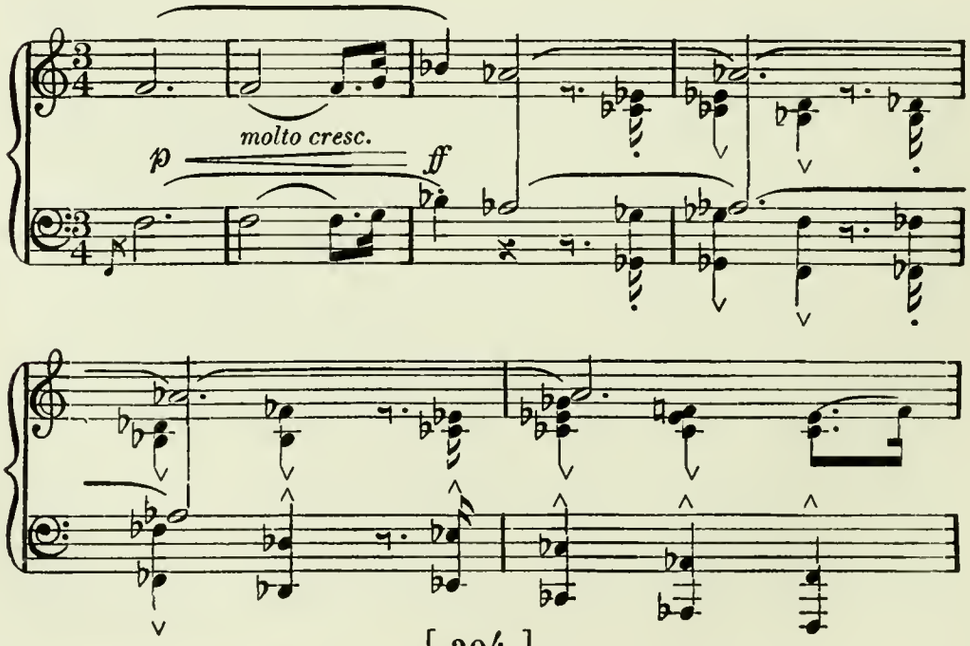


At this barbaric reproach Brangäna draws the curtains and again screens the princess from the view of the warriors and sailors. Then, in confidence, Isolde tells her of her first meeting with Tristan; how, disguised as "Tantris," he came to seek healing at her hands as he was near death with a wound. Then there is heard a new theme, named, "Tristan Wounded":



After the recital of the circumstances of this deceit and of the love that found harbour in their hearts, Isolde declares that she has fixed upon a plan of revenge, and orders her companion to bring her a casket of phials. Out of this she selects the death potion and com-

mands Brangäna to pour it into a goblet. Then Kurwenal appears, to announce their approach to port and to warn the women to get themselves in readiness to land. Isolde, threatening refusal to accompany Tristan before his king, commands Kurwenal to summon Tristan to appear before her. Kurwenal carries the message and then reappears to announce Tristan's approach. The orchestra most effectively employs the interlude, before Tristan's approach, by foreshadowing the heroic qualities of this knight. For this purpose a new theme is used, "Tristan the Hero":



This brief passage of introduction is an instance of Wagner's powers of musical delineation. Here, in tones, is outlined a hero of gigantic stature, a man of undoubted valour and wondrous strength.

This theme is the last among the important motives of this act. During the scene between Tristan and Isolde the music flashes forth its comments and messages, accompanying each situation, even each utterance, with its play of motives.

A volume could be devoted to a detailed analysis of the music of this work, and a goodly share of the space would be given to the first act's composition. But we must content ourselves here with a brief summary of a meagre few of the many noteworthy incidents, and this will resolve itself into a cataloguing of praises.

The action of the act is infinitesimal. In reviewing the actual dramatic incidents of this act, it becomes apparent that very little dramatic happening has taken place before our eyes. Yet the music belies all this, and we know then that Wagner has dealt with the

soul struggle and that he has followed this with microscopic musical detail. He is, here, a tonal psychologist. The shades of meaning are reflected in this wonderful, mirror of corruscating music, and the reflection is thrown across the footlights with amazing clearness.

All this is done with remarkable little outer framing. The picture presented to the eye is almost a monotonous one; there is seldom opportunity for play of lights, and the scene remains practically the same from beginning to end. Nor has Wagner called the aid of many musical externals to help him bound and fasten this act's intensity. Mention has been made of the theme representing the sea, the programme meaning of which is of slight effectiveness; and I find but one other incident of like character in this act, and that occurs when Kurwenal announces to the women that they are nearing land and that the flag has been hoisted to the masthead, where it is fluttering its welcome to the expectant company of King Marke's palace. Here trills and rippling runs in the oboe

and flute suggest to the ear the picture of a fluttering, waving flag.

The rest of this music is soul play, mood play, and it rises almost steadily from the opening of the Prelude — an exquisite beginning with as clever an example of mixing of orchestral colour as can be found in the entire work — to the close of the act, which is the climax. Now the emotional intensity of this Prelude is high, and yet Wagner has built up from this level so that he arrives at exalted heights of climax during the course of the act and at its final climax. At the particular point of conclusion, when the ecstasy of the two lovers has burst its control, when the universe seems to revolve about these two beings, there comes the sound of the outer world, the banal play of trumpets welcoming the homecoming of Tristan, escorting the bride of the King! It is almost a brutal note, and it jolts the hearer into a consciousness of worldly things and brings him to a realisation of consequences. It is planned with exceeding cunning: Wagner had allowed the bliss of the twain to run riot — there was no further climax

possible. And at that moment there comes the hoarse cry of: "Cornwall, hail!" which dies away amid the blatant fanfare of the trumpets of welcome.

Wagner was a magician of the theatre.

CHAPTER VII

THE MUSIC: ACT II

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THE MUSIC: ACT II

SINCE YESTERDAY I have been occupied with the Tristan again. I'm in the second act still, but — what music it's becoming! I could work my whole life long at this music alone. O, it grows deep and fair, and the sublimest marvels fit so supply to the sense; I have never made a thing like this! But I am also melting away in this music; I'll hear of no more, when it's finished. In it I will live for aye, and with me —

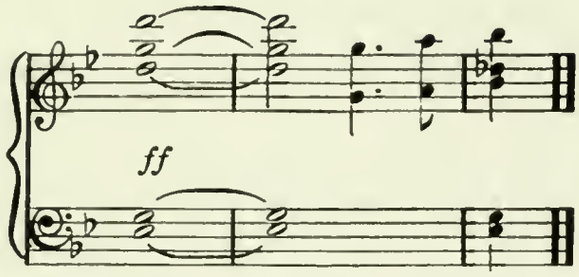
From this excerpt out of Wagner's Venice Diary it is easy to see how intimate a document

this music was becoming, and how, fired by his affection for Mathilde Wesendonck, he was labouring lovingly to mould this work — "our child of sorrows" he had called it when writing to her.

The beginning of the music of this act still dates from the Zurich days, it having been begun May 4, 1858, and at the head of this act's sketches Wagner wrote: "Still in the Refuge." The entire first set of composition drafts of this act were completed at the "Asyl," and there, too, the orchestration of this music was begun. But it was interrupted by that dramatic flight from his "Refuge," and the upheaval brought with it a delay in the completion of this act's music which was not concluded until March 9, of the following year, at Venice. Thus the second act occupied a greater time in its composition than did either of the other two.

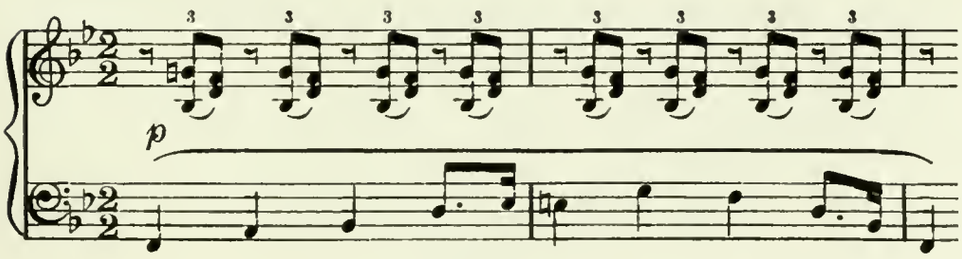
The rising of the curtain upon the act is preceded by an Introduction which is a wonderful bit of mood picturing. The opening chord grips the hearer with its imperative crash, and the balance of this theme, especially the curt ending, leaves the listener filled with

the anticipation of tragedy. This theme is called "Day":



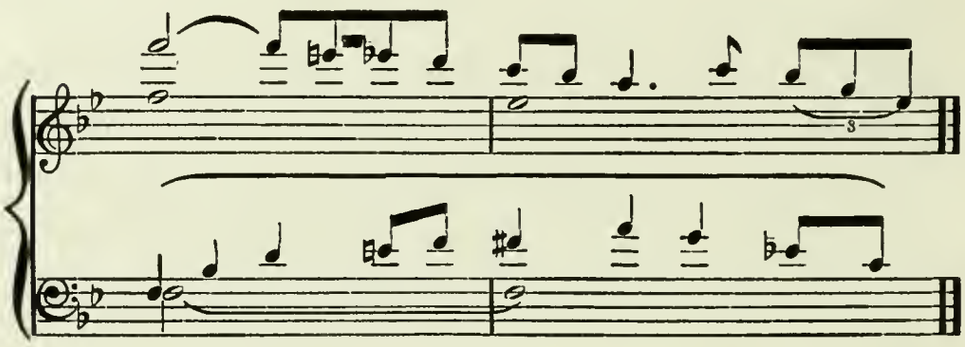
It occupies an important place during the course of the act, being presented in various forms. Oddly enough — for Wagner was a man of quick and keen sense of theatrical effectiveness — it was not originally the composer's intention to place this theme so prominently at the beginning of the Introduction: that was an afterthought, and it does not appear in the first composition sketches, according to which the Introduction began with what is now its ninth measure.

The ninth measure begins the theme of "Impatience":

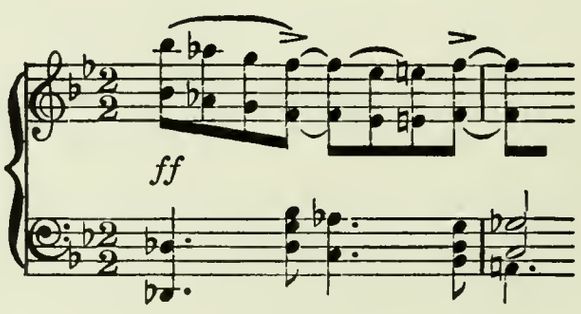


voiced at first in its simplest form, but developed later and achieving its greatest significance when Isolde has extinguished the torch and is beckoning impatiently to her approaching lover.

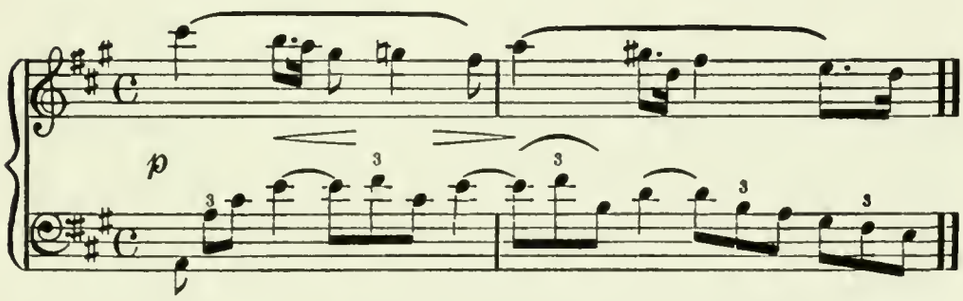
The next theme is that of "Ardour" — also known as "Love's Call":



and, following quickly upon its heels, is another important theme much alike in emotional character. This is the theme of "Passionate Transport":

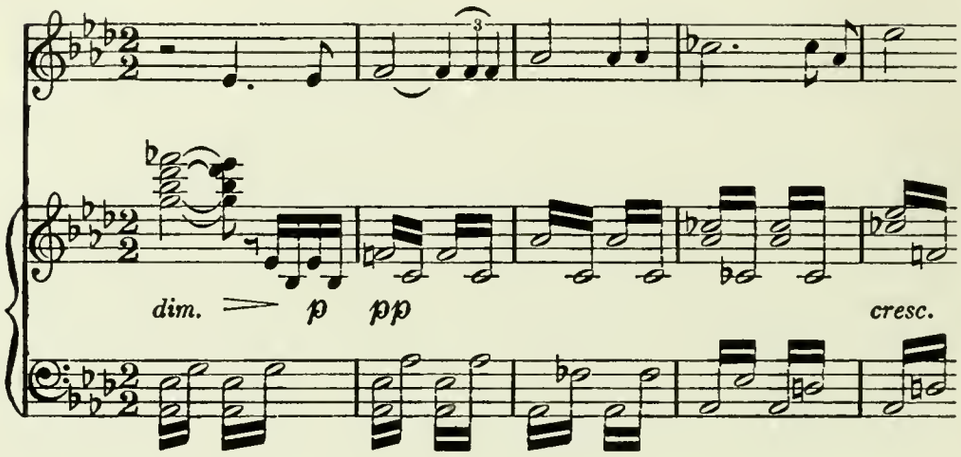


The music of this Introduction, after mounting to an impassioned climax, leads without halt into the music of the first scene. It precipitates the listener's mood from that of glowing passion into the vibrating mystery of a summer night. From out of the depths of the forest sound, with receding distinctness, the horn calls of the royal hunting party. Isolde is impatient to imagine them safely out of hearing and she chides Brangäna for her prudence, telling her that she is ignorant of love and its spell. This calls for a new motive, the "Song of Love":



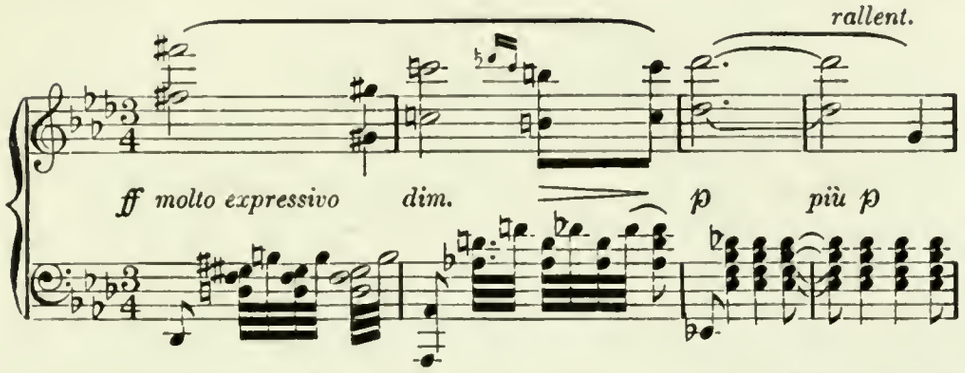
Isolde, unable to control her longing, sends Brangäna to the tower to watch, while she snatches the torch from its ring and puts it out. The music now rises to wild impatience as Isolde signals to Tristan by waving her scarf, and soon the lover rushes out of the

forest into her embrace. Then follows the wonderful love duet, a great share of which music is based upon the melody and the mood of a theme called "Invocation to Night":

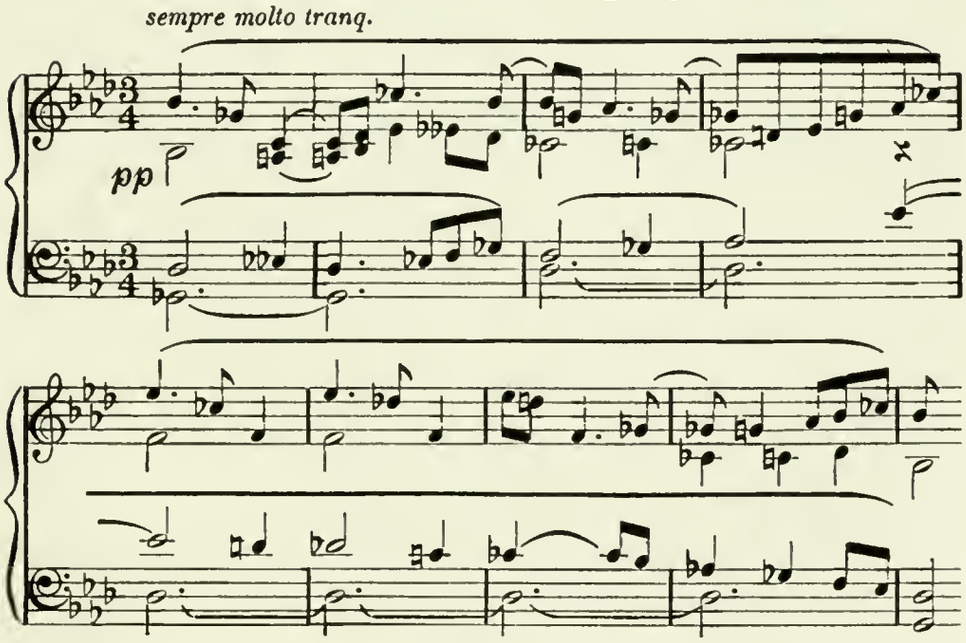


The music of this episode is based upon the song "Träume," which Wagner composed to the text of Mathilde Wesendonck. He wrote, just after he had achieved this scene: "A severe critic will find a touch of reminiscence in it: 'Träume' flit close by. . . ." He avoided such criticism, however, by having the music of the song published as a "Study for 'Tristan and Isolde.'"

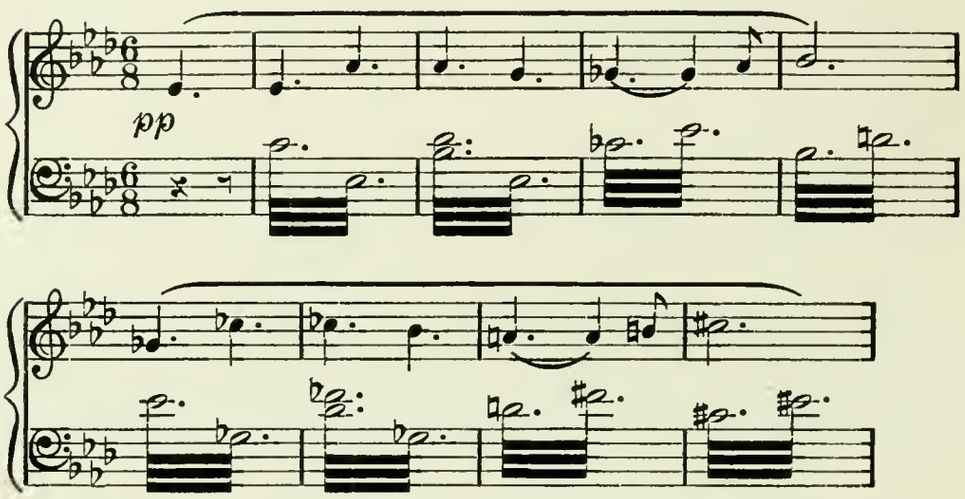
Another theme which figures importantly in the scene is "Death the Liberator":



Soon after the introduction of this last mentioned theme there comes that supremely beautiful interruption of Brangäna singing her chaunt of warning from the tower. This remains unheeded by the lovers, who give freedom to their ecstasy. Here a new motive comes into elaborate musical play, "Felicity":



To the list of themes of this scene there is added still another, the "Song of Death," which melody also proves to be the basis of the final incident in the last act — that of Isolde's love death:

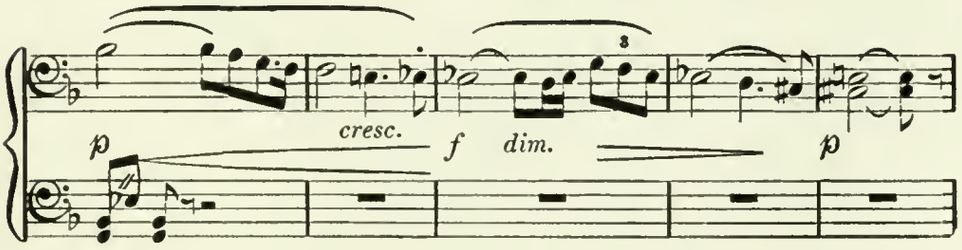


The beauty of this scene cannot possibly be compressed into words. It is so full of the incense of love, and is cast into such high relief of ecstasy by the gloomy mystery of the night which encircles its happenings, that words seem valueless even to convey a vague impression of the exquisite charm of this incident. Wagner seems fully to have realised the importance of the episode, for he wrote of it: "My greatest masterpiece in this art of

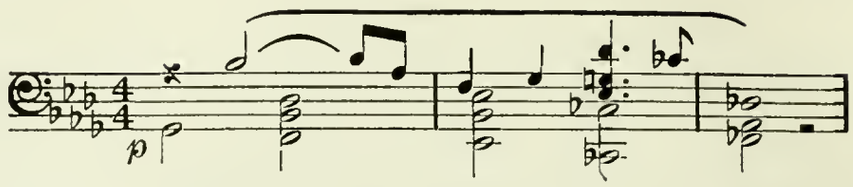
subtlest and most gradual transition is assuredly the big scene in the second act of 'Tristan and Isolde.' The commencement of this scene offers the most overbrimming life in its most passionate emotions,—its close the devoutest, most consecrate desire of death. Those are the piers: now see, child, how I've spanned them, how it all leads over from the one abutment to the other!"

Just as this scene is at its peak of emotion, there is a brusque and discordant interruption, and Kurwenal rushes in, crying, "Save yourself, Tristan!" King Marke, attended by his retinue, headed by Melot, now burst upon the scene, surprising the two lovers.

The remainder of the act is taken up by the accusation and lament of King Marke. Here the music is based principally upon two themes, that of "King Marke's Lament"



and the theme of "King Marke":



The incident is one of the most beautiful in the work. Here Wagner has loosed his fount of appealing, tender melody. "Cornwall's weary king" is racked with grief at his knight's deceit, but his feeling is that of exquisite sorrow. Tristan finds no answer to his king's questions and reproaches, but he turns to Isolde and asks if she will follow him into the land of night. She acquiesces, and he kisses her tenderly on the forehead. Then, feigning fury, he turns upon Melot, who had betrayed him to the King, and calls upon him to defend himself. Upon Melot's sword Tristan throws himself, in expiation of his crime against the King. The orchestra sounds forth, at its loudest, a distorted version of the theme of "Love's Confession"—the first theme in the work, heard in the first act Prelude—and then stops with a shrieking chord of D minor, leaving the hearer impressed by the swift dramatic action which has brought the act to a close.

The quotation at the beginning of the chapter shows conclusively how intimately attached Wagner had become to the music of this act while writing it. There is still another reference to it, penned after the music of this section had been composed, and it is interesting to note from it how great a share of himself Wagner wrote into his work:

"The second act still taxed me severely; Life's utmost fire flamed up in it with such unspeakable fervour, that it burned and consumed me almost personally. The more it quenched toward the close of the act, and the soft radiance of death's transfigurement emerged from the glow, the calmer I myself became."

It is a wonderful act, and its love duet is probably the most famous incident of this kind in all the literature of dramatic music. What little of Schopenhauer's philosophy Wagner has lured into the text falls mostly upon deaf ears; what is heard is the marvellously beautiful music which has but one meaning: the love and yearning of man and woman.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MUSIC: ACT III

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THIS TRISTAN IS BECOMING something *terrible*.

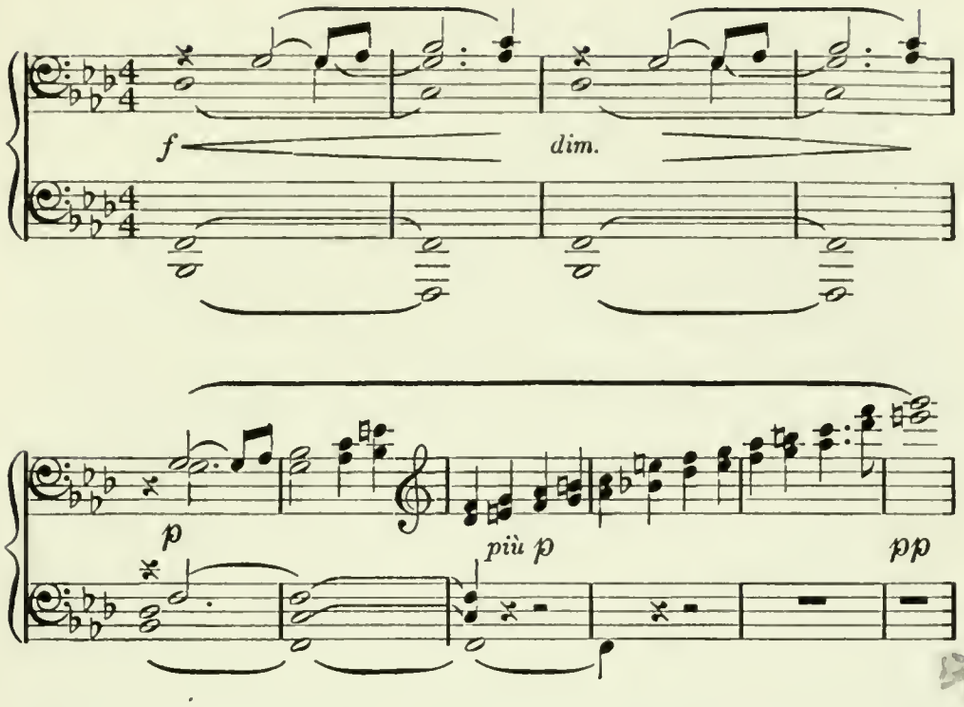
"This last act!!!—

"I fear the opera will be forbidden — unless the whole is turned into parody by bad production — nothing but indifferent performances can save me! Completely *good* ones are bound to send folk crazy, —I can see nothing else for it. . . ."

How deeply Wagner was impressed by the tragic intensity which his music of this act was assuming is clearly stated in the

above note. Its entire composition — sketches, orchestral draft, and completed score — was achieved in Lucerne, where it was begun April 9 and completed August 6, 1859, thus occupying a bit less than four months, which period included even the transcribing of clean copy for the publishers. These days were comparatively happy ones for Wagner; at least they represented a lull between two storms: the episode of his flight from Zurich was behind him, and his wretched Paris "Tannhäuser" experience had not yet occurred to scar his nature with deeper artistic disappointment. So, relieved of the stress of harrowing incidents and freed of the unhappy presence of his wife, his energies spurted toward a completion of the work that had obsessed him for two years.

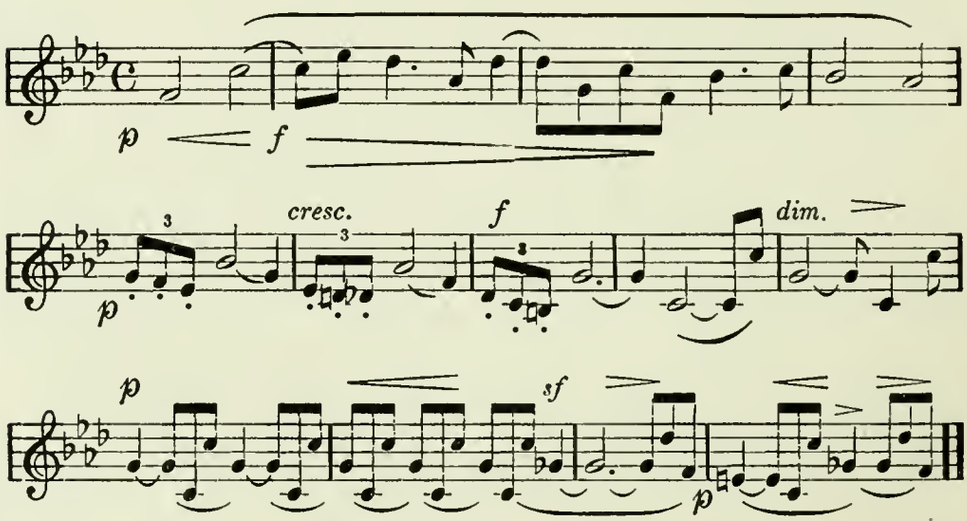
The note of hopeless tragedy is knelled forth by the opening music of this act. The beginning spreads a most arid sense of desolation. There is no moment of consolation to be sought in this episode: it is the very blankness of despair. Its chief theme is that of "Solitude":



The kernel of the incident is to be found in the music of the song "Im Treibhaus," the words by Mathilde Wesendonck, which Wagner composed in 1858. As in the case of the song "Träume," Wagner had "Im Treibhaus" published as a "Study for 'Tristan and Isolde.'" One rather odd feature about this Introduction to the third act is that Wagner does not call it "Prelude" or "Introduction," but simply designates it as "First Scene." It leads into the first act without any pause. So oppressive is the gloom of this music that the rising of the

curtain comes as a relief to the emotional tension.

The picture disclosed is that of Tristan's castle. Ruin and devastation are visible all about. Spread out under the shade of a lime tree lies Tristan apparently dead, and Kurwenal bends solicitously over him watching for some sign of life. The desolate gloom of this picture is deepened by the sad plaint which a shepherd is playing on his pipes. The theme has been named "Sadness":

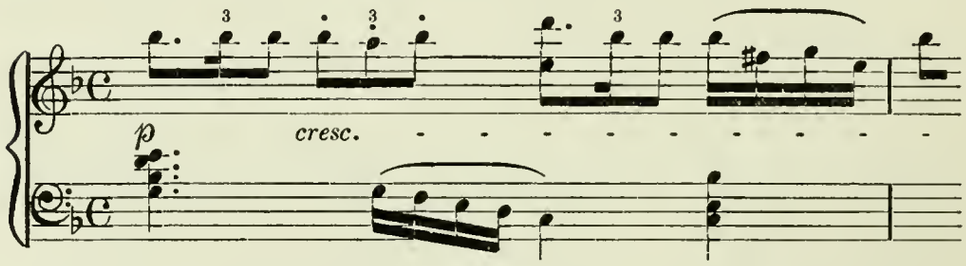


It is played on the English horn, and the melancholy timbre of the instrument adds to the lugubriousness of the lamenting wail. It has been hinted that this melody of sorrow

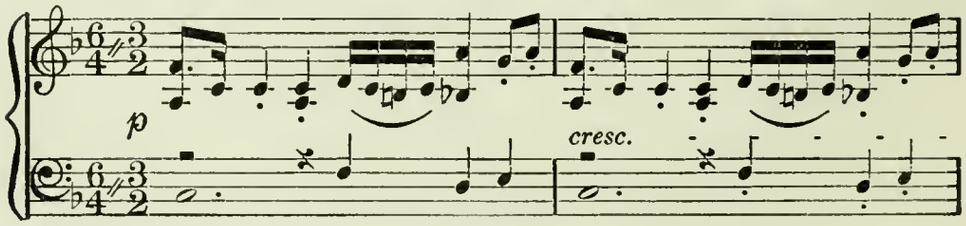
was suggested to Wagner during his unhappy days in Venice, after his flight from the "Asyl" and separation from Mathilde Wesendonck. Wagner has not directly substantiated this, but there is a reference in his essay on "Beethoven" which describes the incident:

"During a sleepless night I once stepped out on the balcony before my window on the Grand Canal in Venice; like a deep dream the legendary city of Lagoons lay spread out in shadow before me. In the midst of the most profound silence suddenly arose the strong, hoarse lament of a gondolier just awakened on his bark, with which he cried out into the night at repeated intervals, until from farthest distance a similar cry answered along the nocturnal canal. I recognised the ancient, melancholy melodic phrase which was adapted to Tasso's familiar verse in his day, but which in itself is certainly as old as Venice's canals and their population. After solemn pauses, the far-resounding dialogue became more animated and appeared to melt into unison, until finally, in the vicinity and in the distance, the sounds softly died away in newly won slumber."

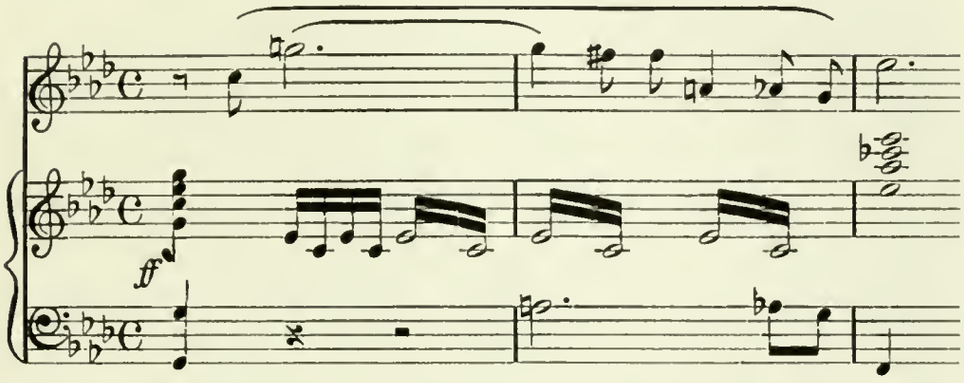
The Shepherd appears to ask how his master fares, and Kurwenal sends him back to the lookout to spy for Isolde's ship — Kurwenal having sent for her as the one possible means of curing Tristan of the wound he received from Melot's sword. As the Shepherd disappears from sight he again lets his pipes sing their sad lament, and at the sound Tristan barely opens his eyes, wakened into consciousness by the old familiar air. He asks to know where he is, and the question stirs Kurwenal to uncontrolled joy at finding his master alive. The theme of "Kurwenal's Joy" is:



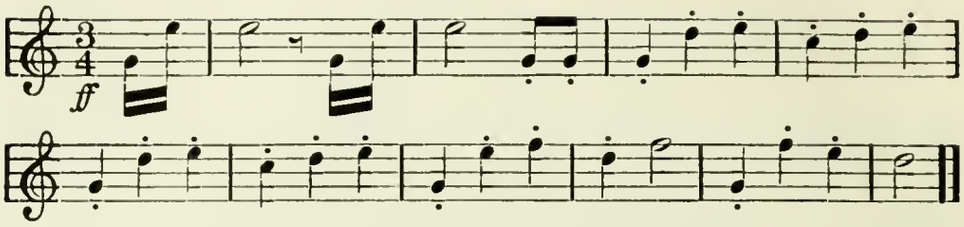
Tristan repeats his question, and Kurwenal tells him that he is in his own castle in Kareol; this gives rise to a new motive, called "Kareol":



Then follows the long scene of Tristan's yearning for Isolde and of his delirium. He lashes himself to a pitch of ecstasy and misery, and ends by cursing the love potion which brought about all his bliss and misery. The "Curse Theme" is heard:



Tristan falls unconscious, and as Kurwenal bends over the lifeless figure there is heard in the orchestra music suggesting the fluttering heart beats. Again Tristan comes to life, and raving, fancies he sees the approaching ship. His excitement sways him to a climax again, and just as he insists that the ship is nearing the shore there is heard, from the Shepherd, a jubilant strain, which bears no special title, but is interesting to quote to show the contrast between it and the mournful theme first played by the Shepherd:



In one of Wagner's Lucerne letters he makes reference to this theme and states that while working at it there came into his head a more jubilant melody. He was tempted at first to revamp the "Tristan and Isolde" Shepherd theme; but then it occurred to him that the other theme fitted into "Siegfried," and he applied it to the closing portion of the scene between Siegfried and Brünnhilde.

No new themes of importance occur between this episode of the sighting of Isolde's ship and the close of the work. The rest is briefly told: Tristan sends Kurwenal to carry up Isolde from the shore, and then he gives vent to his joy. He tears the bandages from his wound and, depleted of strength, sways into Isolde's arms just as she appears. With her name on his lips he dies, and she swoons across his corpse.

A second ship is sighted, and Kurwenal barricades the archway. Melot and the men

of King Marke appear, and Kurwenal kills Melot, but is himself slain in the battle. Then King Marke comes on the scene, bringing peace, and with him comes Brangäna. The King laments the death of his knight, while Brangäna attends her mistress. Isolde opens her eyes and, transfigured, sings a chaunt of resigned love. At its conclusion she falls lifeless, and the curtain descends upon this picture of human wreckage.

In contrast to the lyricism of the second act, this one is devoted in great measure to dramatic utterance. Nearly the entire Tristan monologue is dramatic in the extreme, and the solitary big lyric moment of the act is the finale, Isolde's "Love Death"—as it has been sentimentally christened. Even in this there lurks the strong note of the dramatic, as expressed by the climax, but the convincing characteristic is that of absolute resignation. Seldom has the yearning of a life-weary soul found such ideal expression as here. It is a remarkably effective ending to all the tempest and stress of emotion that have gone before, and it is the only theatrically logical conclusion

to a work that for three acts has thundered its passion and sung its yearning. The complete change of mood voiced by this finale acts not as an anti-climax, but as the highest moment not only of this act, but also of the entire music drama. Thus is the whole work rounded off, leaving no fluttering strands to torment the listener. Its ending has the ring of the inevitable, the final. Whatever quarrel remains in the auditor's imagination is with fate, and not with Wagner's dramatic scheme.

As "Tristan and Isolde" was designed at the start with more reasonably practicable ideas—compared with "Der Ring des Nibelungen," which composition was interrupted and put aside because of its apparently impossible dimensions and difficulties—the orchestra employed in its production is simpler than that of the others of Wagner's greater works. The score calls for the usual strings (first and second violins, violas, violoncellos, and double basses), three flutes (one interchangeable with piccolo), two oboes, one English horn, two

clarinets, one bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one bass tuba, kettledrums, triangle, cymbals, and one harp.

In addition to this ensemble there are required on the stage: three trumpets, three trombones, six horns, and one English horn; also does the composer suggest the employment of a special instrument to voice the jubilant strains when Isolde's ship is sighted, in the third act. This instrument, Wagner suggests, should be of wood and designed after the model of a Swiss Alpenhorn.

Of the orchestration itself there is little to be said save that it is wonderful. It is constantly shimmering, its play of tonal colour being lavish in effect and of endless beauty. It seems hardly reasonable to believe at the present day that this score should have proved such a stumbling block that it required the artistic edict of a king to make its performance possible. Compared with some modern scores, that of "Tristan and Isolde" is of great simplicity; but when contrasted with Wagner's earlier works and with the contemporaneous

scores of Italy and France,—always excepting those of Berlioz,—it will be found that this work is complicated and full of surprises. Wagner blazed the way for many of the moderns with their treacherous darings and almost insurmountable orchestral difficulties. And yet, beside some of these, the orchestration of "Tristan and Isolde" is a model of pellucid effectiveness. Wagner has written more complex works, but it is doubtful if ever he penned a more effective bit of writing than these immortal pages of "Tristan and Isolde."

CHAPTER IX

BEGINNINGS AND FIRST PERFORMANCES

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THE BIRTH AND growth of both the drama and the music of "Tristan and Isolde" having been traced in detail in several of the preceding chapters, let us, for the sake of reference, summarise the dates, condensing them within a single paragraph:

The preliminary studies of old legends were made by Wagner during the Dresden days, 1843 to 1849, but the first definite resolve to compose a "Tristan and Isolde" was framed in a letter to Liszt, dated

late in 1854. The first prose sketch of the work was finished August 20, 1857, and the completed poem — in detail almost identical with the version set to music — was dated September 18 of the same year. Almost immediately the composition sketches were produced, in the following intervals: Act I, October 1 to December 31, 1857; Act II, May 4 to July 1, 1858; Act III, April 9 to July 16, 1859. The complete scoring of the music followed rapidly: Act I, November 5, 1857, to January 13, 1858; Act II, July 5, 1858, to March 9, 1859; Act III, May 1 to July 19, 1859. The Leipzig music publishers, Breitkopf & Härtel, accepted the work long before its completion and agreed to pay Wagner the equivalent of four hundred dollars, one half of the entire stipulated sum, upon receipt of the first act. So the composer hurried the "fair copy" of the first act to his publishers as soon as possible. Fired by enthusiasm, he worked with feverish haste at the last act, so the entire score was completed and transcribed by August 6, 1859, and the final pages were sent to his publishers on the following day. Hans

von Bülow's famous pianoforte and vocal score of the work was finished at Easter, 1860.

And yet with this music drama, a work which in greatness was leagues and leagues beyond any of his former published works, Wagner had to struggle about six years before he could find anyone to give it performance — a record upon which the opera houses of Germany certainly have no reason to pride themselves. It is true that at the time the work was completed Wagner was still a political exile — because of his participation in the Dresden revolt of 1849 — but a general amnesty was granted to these offenders in 1860. This freedom did not include Saxony, but Minna Wagner obtained the full Dresden amnesty for her husband in 1862. Not until June 10, 1865, was "Tristan and Isolde" produced, and then it required no lesser influence than that of a king — Ludwig II of Bavaria — to bring this work to hearing, and eventually bring Germany to the realisation that Wagner was a genius and that "Tristan and Isolde" was a masterpiece. If the stages of German opera houses had been crammed with master-

pieces during those days, there might have been some reasonable excuse for letting the wellnigh impossibly difficult new work of Wágner bide its chance. But such was not the case, and this episode in the art history of Germany is probably one which the nation would like to write anew.

Let us review the interesting struggle which attended the feat — it was nothing less — of achieving production for "Tristan and Isolde." In an earlier chapter it is shown how Wagner reluctantly forsook the composition of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" because the scores could find no purchaser and because the possibilities of finding opera stages to mount this tetralogy were practically precluded, so he turned to "Tristan and Isolde" eagerly, believing that it would find ready takers, both for publication and for production, since it was to be designed as "a simple work." This was his conviction even before he had penned a line of the poem, and he so expressed himself in a letter to Liszt in December, 1856. In May of the following year, again to Liszt, Wagner announces definitely that he has

"decided to finish at once 'Tristan and Isolde' on a moderate scale . . . and to produce it next year at Strassburg, with Niemann and Madame Mayer. There is a beautiful theatre there, and the orchestra and the other not very important characters I hope to get from a neighbouring German court theatre." At this time, too, there came the invitation, from the Emperor of Brazil, to write an opera for Rio de Janeiro. And this offer, foolish as later it turned out to be, induced a resolution to dedicate the score to the Emperor of Brazil and to have the proposed "Tristan and Isolde" translated into Italian.

Two months later there visited Wagner, at Zurich, Eduard Devrient, the director of the Grand Ducal Theatre at Carlsruhe, and to him Wagner spoke of the "Tristan and Isolde" scheme. Devrient approved of this, but instead of agreeing that Strassburg would be the most desirable city for the bringing out of this work, he suggested to Wagner that Carlsruhe be selected, and he promised to do all he could toward perfecting the necessary arrangements. It happened that the Grand Duke of Baden

had had occasion to be amiable to Wagner for some slight attention the composer had granted the Grand Duchess of Baden, and — most likely as a result of Devrient's intercession — the Grand Duke wrote to Wagner and expressed the hope of seeing him at Carlsruhe. Thus far, at least, Wagner had reason to suppose that he would quickly loom into public notice in Germany through a production of his newest work, just as soon as it was to be ready for performance. Franz Liszt, to whom all these matters were confided, encouraged this scheme, and he enlisted the further sympathy of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Baden, asking the former to intercede in Wagner's behalf to get permission from the King of Saxony allowing Wagner to conduct "Tristan and Isolde" at Weimar — for Liszt assured Wagner that the opera stage at Weimar should follow in producing this work; he also interested the director of the Prague theatre in the new composition.

In answer to Liszt's question, posed in October, 1858, about the settled place for the first performance of the work, Wagner writes

that the Grand Duke of Baden has acquired the right to the work and that, if he can arrange to get Wagner permission to go to Carlsruhe for the performance, it will be heard there for the first time. Five months later, however, nothing has been achieved in the matter of amnesty for Wagner, although the newspapers announce the first performance of "Tristan and Isolde" at Carlsruhe as having been fixed for September, 1859. The Grand Duke of Baden had meanwhile pleaded with the King of Saxony to pardon Wagner's political offences and grant him the freedom of the country again so that he might supervise the rehearsing of "Tristan and Isolde" at Carlsruhe — but in vain.

Early in the autumn of 1859 Liszt writes Wagner that he learns the work is to be performed at Carlsruhe on the birthday of the Grand Duchess, in December, and that Wagner is to conduct it on this occasion — but Wagner had already gone to Paris by September, thoroughly discouraged. He writes to Liszt: "'Tristan,' altogether, has become a shadowy and half impossible thing." Two months later

the hope of a first performance at Carlsruhe has been dismissed, Devrient, the director of the theatre, giving as an excuse that it is "impossible to execute the work"; and Liszt writes that this manager "was inclined to bet that 'Tristan' could not be performed anywhere else either, unless you consented to considerable alterations." Then Liszt, with artistic magnanimity, offers to put on the work at Weimar during the season of 1861 if Wagner can find no other outlet for it.

Now Hanover looms up as a possible place for performance, the King of Hanover professing interest in Wagner, according to the report of tenor Niemann, who was then engaged at the Hanover theatre as dramatic tenor, and who created the rôle of Tristan in the United States many years afterward. In April, 1861, matters seem to have become so desperate that Liszt even suggests the performance of a fragment of the work at the Weimar Meeting of Musicians, but Wagner declines this and Liszt confesses that he is unable to produce the work at Weimar because of the expenses connected with such a task.

Wagner was now passing through his bitter Paris days: the "Tannhäuser" fiasco at the Grand Opéra, the history of which still remains a blot on the record of the artistic intelligence of the Parisians. Wagner had fondly hoped that, "Tannhäuser" proving the expected success, "Tristan" would find a haven within the walls of the French capitol, but no trace of this dream remained after the disgraceful exhibition which attended the "Tannhäuser" performances. So Wagner cast his eyes about the horizon.

The faithful Von Bülow having been diplomatically at work during this time, Wagner received a promise that "Tristan and Isolde" would be given performance at Carlsruhe under the auspices of the grand-ducal pair. But it also happened that the very singers necessary for the title rôles—Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld and his wife—had left Carlsruhe and had accepted engagements at the Dresden Royal Opera, an institution the doors of which were politically closed against Wagner. So he hastened from Paris to Vienna, hoping there to find singers.

He found that it would be impossible to get leave of absence for the needed artists, but there arose the strong possibility of having "Tristan and Isolde" performed at the Vienna Imperial Opera House — and to this Wagner agreed, it being stipulated that the rehearsals begin in the autumn of 1861.

One feature about this Vienna visit must be emphasised: it was here that Wagner heard his "Lohengrin" for the first time — "Lohengrin" which he had composed thirteen years before! The hearing of this work made a great difference to the composer, and he has expressed it: "Everything which I witnessed on that intoxicating night in May gave suddenly a new direction to my life."

Anders, the principal tenor of the Vienna ensemble, became indisposed, and the rehearsals were postponed a year. He resumed his study of the rôle of Tristan that summer, and between November, 1862, and March, 1863, no fewer than fifty-four rehearsals of the work were held. Then it was declared "impossible," and Wagner, who was conducting some concerts in Moscow, was notified

that he need not hurry to Vienna for the full rehearsals of his "Tristan and Isolde."

Then followed the dark days when Wagner knew scarcely which way to turn for shelter and money. He had to flee from Vienna to escape debts, and he asked that his old "Asyl" on the "Green Hill" at Zurich be opened to him again; but this haven was refused him, and he went to his friends, the Willes, at Mariafeld, near Zurich. There he spent about one month, a dejected man fully conscious of the greatness of his accomplished works and entirely despairing of any further success beyond the trivial approval that had already come to him. And then appears the King of Bavaria upon the scene of Wagner's life drama. "When everyone forsook me, a warm and noble heart beat all the higher for my art ideal; it cried to the rejected artist, 'What thou desir'st I will!' And this time the will was creative; 't was the will of—a *King*." Thus Wagner describes the turning point in his life.

The King of Bavaria had just ascended the throne, and having been converted by "Lohen-

grin" into admiring Wagner's music while still a prince, he now set out to rule in art as well as in affairs of state. Once upon the throne, he sent for Wagner. And report has it that his agent hunted the very corners of Germany for Wagner, who had left Zurich at the news of the rumour that his Viennese creditors were pursuing him. However this be, Wagner was brought to Munich by the King's agent, and the result of meeting with the monarch is expressed in a letter he wrote to his friend, Frau Wille, on May 4, 1864: "He wants me to be with him always, to work, to rest, to produce my works; he will give me everything I need; I am to finish my 'Nibelungen' and he will have them performed as I wish. I am to be my own unrestricted master; not Kapellmeister — nothing but myself and his friend. All troubles are to be taken from me; I shall have whatever I need, if only I stay with him."

There follows a lavishly happy period for Wagner. He spends the summer with his youthful friend — King Ludwig was then but eighteen years old — and composes the "Huldi-

gungs Marsch" — "March of Homage" for him. The pair, king and composer, return to Munich in the fall, and Wagner is given a residence in a quiet quarter of the city. In October, 1864, the King commands that "Tristan and Isolde" be studied and produced, and Hans von Bülow is summoned to conduct it. From this time dates Wagner's nearer acquaintance with Von Bülow's wife, Cosima, who was a daughter of Liszt by the Countess d'Agoult. Wagner had known her before, and even after her marriage the acquaintance had continued, for the bridal couple, as related in the second chapter, had visited Wagner at his "Asyl," in Zurich. Now, however, a new friendship between Wagner and Cosima von Bülow sprang up, which culminated, six years later, in marriage, after her union with Von Bülow had been set aside.

All plans were made for three performances of "Tristan and Isolde," to take place at the Royal Residenz-theater May 15, 18, 22, 1865. Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld and his wife were engaged to create respectively the rôles of Tristan and Isolde, and the work was to

be conducted by Hans von Bülow. Wagner, through the columns of a Vienna paper, sent forth an invitation to this event, and here he referred to his "dear friend Von Bülow" as his "second self." The final rehearsal took place on May 11, and was attended by King Ludwig. Success promised the first public performance at the Royal Court Theatre, scheduled to take place four days later. Then suddenly the Isolde — Frau Malvina Schnorr — became indisposed, and the performance had to be postponed. The guests who had come from other cities to hear the work were entertained, the doors of Wagner's house being thrown open to them while they waited for the recovery of the artist. Finally, on June 10, 1865, the first performance of "Tristan and Isolde" took place at the Royal Court Theatre. The original cast, Hans von Bülow conducting, was as follows:

Tristan	Herr Schnorr von Carolsfeld
Isolde	Frau Schnorr von Carolsfeld
König Marke	Herr Zottmayer
Kurwenal	Herr Mitterwurzer
Melot	Herr Heinrich

Brangäna	Frl. Deinet
Ein Hirt	Herr Simons
Ein Steuermann	Herr Hartmann

Enthusiasm ran high during this performance and at its close, despite the presence of the King of Bavaria. Herr and Frau Schnorr von Carolsfeld and Wagner were called before the curtain many times, and the success of the work seemed finally to be assured. This verdict was further carried out by the three performances that followed, June 13, 19, and July 1, which were witnessed by large audiences and frankly applauded. Wagner has written a long and enthusiastic paper in which the artistic virtues of Schnorr von Carolsfeld are set forth in detail — particularly those attending his interpretation of Tristan. As though some fate attended the bringing of "Tristan and Isolde" to a hearing, Schnorr von Carolsfeld died July 21 of a fever, said to have been the result of rheumatism induced by the icy stage draughts that swept across him during the last act of "Tristan and Isolde." This death delayed further performances of "Tristan and Isolde," for a successor to Herr

Schnorr was not so readily to be found, but Wagner himself seems for some mysterious reason to have wished to withhold this work from the general public — probably much in the manner afterward adopted with "Parsifal." He writes to Otto Wesendonck, July 31, 1865, telling him that certain of his works are to be the property of the King of Bavaria, who will control them: "I shall never permit 'Tristan and Isolde' to be performed elsewhere than in Munich — and now, probably, never again, not even in Munich."

Whatever may then have been Wagner's intention as to the future disposition of this work, it did not prevent further repetitions. Under the baton of Hans von Bülow it was produced in 1869, in which year this famous conductor forsook his Munich post, and its course was again taken up in 1872 when Von Bülow returned to that city. In the interim of Von Bülow's absence, Wagner had married Cosima.

For about ten years, however, Munich was the only city whose opera stage produced this music drama. Then, in 1874, Weimar followed,

and in 1876 it was heard at the Royal Opera House in Berlin. Within six years Leipzig and Hamburg had embraced the work in their operatic repertoires, and in 1882 it was performed in London. Vienna, the city upon which Wagner's hopes for "Tristan and Isolde" performances had been centered in earlier years, did not produce it until 1883, and three years later it crossed the Atlantic. Its first performance in America took place at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, December 1, 1886. On this memorable occasion the conductor was Anton Seidl, the famous Wagner disciple, and the cast was as follows:

Tristan	Albert Niemann
Isolde	Fräulein Lilli Lehmann
Brangäna	Marianne Brandt
König Marke	Emil Fischer
Kurwenal	Adolf Robinson
Melot	Rudolph von Milde
Ein Hirt	Otto Kemlitz
Ein Steuermann	Emil Saenger
Ein Seemann	Max Alvary

During the summer of this year, 1886, it also had its first Bayreuth performance.

Let it not be supposed that "Tristan and Isolde" enjoyed unopposed triumphs wherever and whenever it was produced during the earlier years of its career. The immense difficulties of the music confined the area of opera houses that performed it; and the demands of the music limited the number of artists capable of singing the work. A new race of singers had to be reared to cope with this music, for it demanded not alone healthy voices of unbounded resources, but it also set forth demands of intellect that were not then, and are not even now, common among opera singers. It is related of Anders, the tenor of the Vienna Opera House upon whose state of health the performance of "Tristan and Isolde" waited so long, that he said at one time the singers were progressing in their rehearsals: they had learned the second act—but had forgotten the first one!

There was also a great deal of critical opposition, headed by the Viennese critic, Eduard Hanslick, for many years Wagner's arch enemy. There were, too, many other enemies that stormed at Wagner's successes; namely, his

political foes. For these it was quite too much to endure that the Bavarian king had taken Wagner into his deepest confidence and had made a companion of him. The attacks and intrigues of these enemies found sufficient basis in the facts that the King was planning to build a theatre for the production of the Wagner works, and that the national music school should be conducted according to the principles formulated by Wagner. They scented grave political danger in these radical reforms, and the machinery of opposition was set in motion effectively and with great cunning, for it was claimed that the King was trying to make art take the place of religion, and that he was contemplating expenditures in connection with Wagner's schemes which would undermine the finances of the state. The outcome was that the proposed theatre was not built, although an approximation of Wagner's dreams came to be realised about two decades after Wagner's death. Then the Munich Prinz Regenten Theater was inaugurated, in 1901, its site being almost identically that of the proposed Wagner Theatre which Ludwig of

Bavaria had contemplated. There seemed but to be one overpowering public voice, and this clamoured in no uncertain words for the removal of Wagner. There was so little hope of stemming this tide of popular disapproval that, in December, 1865, Wagner left Munich at the King's request. With this coup it was hoped that the public's confidence in its monarch might be restored. So Wagner became a wanderer once more, his hopes for a permanent shelter for himself and his art creations shattered a second time in eight years. But the interlude of rest had served an important service: it had made the musical world acquainted with Wagner's masterpiece, "Tristan and Isolde."

CHAPTER X

RICHARD WAGNER'S MASTERPIECE

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I REALISE FULL WELL, in claiming "Tristan and Isolde" to be Wagner's masterpiece, that I am inviting disagreements and am grazing perilously near the ever-hateful question of "taste." In art there is no such thing as "taste." Art is either good or bad; also may it partake, with modifications, of one or the other or of both qualities; but, if it is an art work, it is worthy to be judged by the canons of art and not by the whims of "taste." To laud or decry an art

work because of some excuse of "taste" is a signal of inexcusable laziness or ignorance.

It is almost inconceivable to imagine anyone quarrelling at the present time with "Tristan and Isolde" because of its morals — this being one of the favourite attitudes of those who apply the ell-rule of "taste" to art; but it is easily conceivable that the greatness of "Tristan and Isolde" may readily be compared with the greatness of "Parsifal," "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg," "Götterdämmerung," "Siegfried," or "Die Walküre." The last three of this list can justly be placed beyond the pale of this dispute because they are but integral parts of one magnificent entity—"Der Ring des Nibelungen"—and should strictly not be considered as individual works.

There can, of course, be no just comparison between any of Wagner's earlier works and "Tristan and Isolde," so that leaves only "Parsifal" and "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg" to pit against "Tristan and Isolde." The former is great in its ideally mystic message, while the latter is superb in its humour and travesty. But of the big note of life, the

surge of human passion, there is comparatively little in these two works, while in "Tristan and Isolde" crimson blood of man and woman courses with all the recklessness of realistic existence.

"Parsifal," to be fully appreciated, must ever be crowned with its halo of mystic redemption, and "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg" must always be associated with the life and manners of old Nuremberg. Neither of these works can be transplanted into another mood or into another period. But "Tristan and Isolde" is a love story of all times and all places — it can be translated into any land or any age, the elemental forces remain the same, make the same great appeal. It is cosmic in its vital force, the theme is that of the man and the woman of the universe. And it is Wagner's music that has made this message so tremendous in its far-reaching utterance, that has wiped out the boundaries of place and custom, that has made the longings and anguish of Tristan and of Isolde typify the human, world-wide cry of all love-laden mortals. It is, in short, a masterpiece.

Wagner himself realised the freedom with which this music was pouring from his brain. He had, in his earlier works, carefully built up a system by means of which he was leading opera out of the slough of mere Italian tunefulness and French bombast into the highroad of dramatic seriousness. But even this laboriously planned system was ignored when the inspired music of "Tristan and Isolde" came to be born. He wrote of the process of composition of this work: "Every theory was clean forgotten by me; . . . here I moved with fullest freedom and the most utter disregard of every theoretic scruple, to such an extent that during the working out I myself was aware how far I had outstripped my system."

This "system" is marked by great strides forward in the case of each of the earlier works. "Der Fliegender Holländer" is a vast advance upon "Rienzi," and "Tannhäuser" presents a huge improvement; in the latter work his system is losing some of its crudities and is adapting itself to the dramatic needs rather than compelling the dramatic spirit of the work to bow to the yoke

of the musical system imposed upon it. Wagner believed that in the step from "Tannhäuser" to "Tristan and Isolde" he reached the ideal application of his theories in a greater degree than he had advanced from his beginnings to "Tannhäuser." And this assertion, while doubtless true, is misleading, for between "Tannhäuser" and "Tristan and Isolde" Wagner had composed "Lohengrin," "Das Rheingold," "Die Walküre," and half of "Siegfried." So his theories had had time to crystallise, and Wagner had had opportunities to apply them and learn and profit by their application. It is a fact that, because of his banishment from Germany, he did not hear "Lohengrin" until 1861—thirteen years after he had completed it; so he had no actual opportunities to try out many of his later schemes of reform before they were confined to paper. But Wagner's path was headed so straight out of the wilderness of sheer tunefulness and imposing operatic claptrap that he was confident of the compass points on his artistic chart and could not err, save in lesser details. For instance, it is quite reasonable

to suppose that had Wagner heard his "Lohengrin" before composing "Tristan and Isolde" he would have been more moderate in the dynamic use of brass instruments; but this is a very minor matter, one that opera conductors can and do adjust. Instead of harping on such unimportant matters, let us rather marvel that he achieved not alone so great but also so clean a piece of work as "Tristan and Isolde." During the period of its composition he was cut off from actual contact with opera stages —for the straggling Zurich performances of operatic and orchestral works must have been little else than tantalising to so exigent a musician as Wagner; so he relied upon his artistic convictions blindly, and followed the promptings of inspiration, which, in the case of this work, were of commanding power: here the artist was swayed by woman, his brain was goaded by his heart into producing a drama of love, unhampered by theories. Here Wagner became emancipated; for once the reformer turned lover—and he proclaimed it from the heights of his bliss to all the world. Even his momentary attack of Schopenhauer philos-

ophy was dispelled by the greater force, — the love for Mathilde Wesendonck. Whatever may have been his original plan of stating some philosophic riddles by the text of this work, it was dispelled by the elemental flow of passion which, leaping over the restrictions of the text, found utterance in the impulsive torrent of the music.

In composing none other of his works did Wagner charge his palette with such brilliant tonal colours; at no other occasion was he so lavish in the use of them. Here is the brilliancy of youth refined of the crudities of inexperience. If "Parsifal" may be considered as the glorious sunset of Wagner's artistic career, then "Tristan and Isolde" must be taken as representative of the high noon of his creative powers. "Tristan and Isolde" is to-day nearly half a century old, and more than four decades have elapsed since a king commanded that its greatness be unveiled to the ears of a listening and envious world, yet the work has still to be written which dares challenge its greatness — if we except the others of Wagner's own music dramas.

Far from being the exclusive property of a single opera stage, it has forged its way into most corners of the world and is given numberless performances. Yet its emotional intensity has not diminished nor has its greatness waned. Neither the attacks of an embittered mind like Hanslick's, nor the jealous vapourings of a half-reasoning master mind like Nietzsche's have stemmed its course. "Tristan and Isolde" is the operatic apotheosis of human emotions. It is Wagner's greatest work; and it was born of his greatest love.

THE END

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